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Exploring My Unique Literacy Experiences as a Ukrainian American Emerging Scholar through Autoethnography

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Introduction

The evolution of this capstone project began with the desire to study sources about literacy and capture the importance of my identity through an in-depth look at my unique literacy practices and experiences as a Ukrainian American emerging scholar. The main aim of this project is to emphasize my dual cultural identity primarily through the concepts of literacy, discourse communities, and sociocultural context. These concepts showcase how autoethnography becomes both theory and practice because it is the chosen method that represents how I function in my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities. The other aims of this project are to highlight the significance of how I became a Ukrainian American as well as share transformative knowledge about my literacy experiences with the audience through autoethnography, thereby establishing my ethos as both an academic and a creative writer.

The overall purpose of this capstone project is to depict the most vivid moments of my life as I participate in those discourse communities with literacy as the binding thread in my autoethnographic narratives. The metaphor I use to describe the three main spheres of my life is called "The Local Bazaar." I see this as a place where individuals meet to interact with each other, exchange ideas, and share new knowledge. This metaphor—reminiscent of Mary Louise Pratt's idea of "the contact zone"— allows me to explain how I engage in different discourse communities as an individual who identifies as Ukrainian American.

Ukraine, situated in Eastern Europe, is bordered by the following countries: Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Russia. Along with Ukraine, these neighboring countries were also a part of the former Soviet Union that collapsed in the 1990s. This is significant because all of them share a past stained by Communist leadership that has affected their present economic and political growth. My parents, along with most of my family, emigrated from Ukraine, leaving behind family members, rich memories, and good friends while carrying with them the traditions of their Slavic Pentecostal past. This capstone project thereby details the scholarly knowledge about literacy and autoethnography in the methods and methodology chapter as well as the literature review. Equally as important, the autoethnographic portion sheds light on the both joyful and difficult moments of growing up as a Ukrainian American as I struggle to continue practicing the Slavic Pentecostal traditions that my family never left behind after they moved to the United States.

Literature Review

Overview

Most individuals have a story to tell as to how they came to not only read and write but also understand and make meaning from life experiences. My literacy journey entails literacy practices that shape how I function in particular communities each day. Because the journey contains both personal and cultural elements, I employ the autoethnographic method to tell the reader about my literacy journey that includes literacy experiences from ages eleven, twenty-two, and twenty-three by discussing participation in different discourse communities. This review examines scholarly sources that inform my research process in order to highlight my unique yet generalizable literacy experiences as a Ukrainian American emerging scholar; the literature review also introduces terminology about literacy and how autoethnography expands the ways in which literacy journeys are currently told.

In addition, it identifies gaps in existing scholarship about literacy studies by building off of the ideas of discourse, narrative, and research; the literature review recognizes how literacy theory can inform the shaping of identity because I use reflection to craft a personal narrative. This literature review includes a section titled "Literacy: Terms and Definitions" that provides an overview of literacy-based concepts relating to this capstone project; the section titled "Discourse Communities, Literacy Practices, Sociocultural Context, and The 'Contact Zone'" discusses the importance of communities

as related to my literacy experiences; and the section titled “Autoethnography as Theory and Practice” briefly defines autoethnography and highlight its major components.

Literacy: Terms and Definitions

This section establishes definitions and examples for foundational literacy concepts in order to underscore how one's individual literacy shapes and informs my life, particularly in a written autoethnography. In her work *The Rise of Writing: Redefining Mass Literacy*, Deborah Brandt discusses how the United States shifted from a reading-based to a writing-based society. Brandt defines the role of writing in relation to the fact that literacy has become an economic commodity or resource that individuals now use to their advantage, especially in work environments. Writing, Brandt explains, "became connected not to citizenship but to work, vocation, avocation, and practical living"; in other words, the everyday, ordinary person could use literacy in their daily lives through the act of writing in various contexts (2). By viewing literacy in this way, Brandt invites writers such as F. Niyi Akkinaso to add to and broaden the conversation about literacy; Akkinaso does so by noting that throughout her life, "Literacy had come to mean, for me, a way of life, a way of knowing, a way of talking, and a way of doing" (154). This broader definition of literacy fits the approach of the autoethnography in this capstone project because the ways in which I function each day are influenced by my upbringing and interactions with others in both Ukrainian and American cultures.

Since individuals learn languages and perceive the world in different days, it is beneficial to track literacy development through social interactions. Akkinaso's literacy development is based on how literacy shaped her identity in many spheres of her life, including home, school, and work. And so Akkinaso formed what she called an individual consciousness or "the totality of an individual's knowledge . . . represented . . . especially in writing" that helped her define her own literacy journey as one of struggle

and perseverance (138). In *Literacy in American Lives*, Brandt expands upon Akkinaso's definition of literacy by proposing that literacy can be considered a commodity or "productive resource" (6). By placing literacy into an economic context through the use of the phrase "productive resource," Brandt invites literacy to be viewed as a site where authorship and ownership of writing can intertwine, whether for one's benefit or disadvantage. This perspective on literacy as a "productive resource" is then related to human experience in that individuals' identities become formed by their unique literacy journeys (6). For this reason, Brandt highlights the topic of literacy development or "the accumulating project of literacy learning across a lifetime, the interrelated effects and potentials of learning over time" (7). Some examples of experiences that contribute to an individual's literacy development include access to literacy objects such as technology, writing utensils, sheet music, and books; the presence or absence of sponsors of literacy; and how an individual uses literacy in different spheres of life such as the home and work in order to complete tasks such as paying bills at home or completing projects at work.

Important facets of individuals' literacy development are formed by what Brandt calls "sponsors of literacy," meaning "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (*Sponsors of Literacy* 556). This specific definition of "sponsors of literacy" gives credit to individuals such as relatives and employers, or things such as literacy objects (technology, buildings, or other spaces in which individuals work) that shape identities and color literacy journeys. In this sense, I can gain something from literacy, which is the ability to reflect on and more fully describe my literacy development in detail through the autoethnographic method. In

addition, my sponsors of literacy—among them my dad, mom, Ukrainian teacher, and church members—are depicted in the autoethnography as crucial characters in that journey.

The social interactions with these sponsors helped me develop my current literacy practices and continue to affect the literacy events I engage in on a daily basis. Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton in their article "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice" continue to unpack larger concepts such as literacy practices and literacy events; they make obvious the overlap between some of the literacy terms and language, including: literacy development, sponsors of literacy, and literacy objects. They do so by explaining how literacy is a delocalizing force because it functions in local contexts and can "disrupt local life" (338). They then outline the noteworthy difference between literacy events and literacy practices by stating that the former is concerned with concrete interactions while the latter is a theoretical way of looking at patterns of literacy and their "cultural significance" (342). Literacy events, then, are concrete happenings such as singing traditional hymns, reading books with sponsors of literacy, and participating in other activities that spur literacy development. Unlike literacy events, literacy practices are not observable—rather, literacy practices are abstract because they are considered ways of observing literacy events.

Brandt and Clinton display how literacy events and literacy practices address "things" of literacy, whether those things are concerned with social action or what you can do with those things. They clarify what such "things" include by stressing the power of literacy in relation to sponsorship since "tracing sponsorship to things helps to clarify the multiple interests or agents that are most usually active when reading and writing are

taken up" (350). These literacy things, similar to literacy objects, are considered physical materials by which individuals experience literacy in their daily lives such as technology, writing utensils, and print materials. It is evident that literacy can manifest itself in individuals to foster what Akkinaso calls "a way of knowing" and "a way of doing" (154). In the story of my literacy development, Akkinaso's definition of literacy becomes particularly useful concerning the ways in which I situate myself within certain discourse communities. This section reveals the importance of multiple literacy concepts (especially literacy events, literacy practices, and literacy development) as well as how those concepts can be applied to an individual's life. This section, therefore, provides the knowledge necessary in order for me to explore the impact of literacy on my unique life experiences.

Discourse Communities, Literacy Practices, Sociocultural Context, and the "Contact Zone"

This section highlights how participation in discourse communities becomes an important factor in my literacy development as well as how situating literacy within a sociocultural context is essential to understanding literacy development. The section also adds to the definition of literacy practices established in the previous section by relating literacy practices to ideology and context. The phrase "literacy practices" connects directly with the phrase "discourse practices" that James Gee discusses in his article "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction and What Is Literacy," and the relation between the two phrases is evident. Gee provides that "discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society," proving that the ways in which individuals practice literacy and discourse are linked not only to power relationships but also to sociocultural context and ideology (538). Additionally, Gee stresses the difference between the capitalized "Discourses" as connected to identity and "ways of being in the world" (529), while a "discourse" is how literacy is practiced in a "social network" (537). For the purposes of this literature review, only the term "discourse" as part of a discourse community is discussed because of the emphasis on social networks and sociocultural context.

I participate in domestic, academic, and religious communities, and those communities consist of individuals from both Ukrainian and American cultures. The domestic discourse community includes information about how I learned Ukrainian primarily from age eleven, while the academic and religious communities include information about how I engaged in particularly significant literacy experiences from

ages eleven, twenty-two, and twenty-three. In the autoethnography, my way of learning to understand the world is partly presented through how I learned to read and write the Ukrainian language because gaining those language-learning skills are crucial to and embedded within my literacy journey. Using different languages in different places hence shapes my literacy practices and experiences. Ukrainian is used primarily within the domestic and religious communities, and strictly English is used in the academic community; this example about language use magnifies literacy's power as a transformative tool that molds individuals' literacy practices over time.

Barton and Hamilton more clearly link literacy practices to power by explicitly stating that "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others" (8). In turn, literacy functions ideologically as well because power structures exist within any institution no matter the type. The social networks that make literacy practices and literacy events possible bring to light the fact that literacy is situated in historical, cultural, and social contexts. This fact about literacy must be acknowledged because if literacy is not contextually situated, then the literacy myth would prevail and many current studies about literacy would become irrelevant.

Context also allows for community participants to become creators of shared, new knowledge that is eventually disseminated to all of the community members, as discussed in the autoethnography when I describe the finer details of how a Slavic Pentecostal church service is typically conducted. A literacy concept involving knowledge that calls forth a context-based literacy can be found in the article "Lessons from Research with Language-Minority Children" where Moll and Gonzalez coin the phrase "funds of

knowledge" or collective, shared, historicoculturally-influenced "knowledge and skills" that allow individuals to function (160). Such funds of knowledge cannot be disseminated unless literacy is contextually situated. Context is also crucial to acknowledge because in the autoethnography, the social networks "comprised of one center person or family . . . and all immediate intimates in terms of kin and friendship" work together as a whole in order to shape identity (Farr 467). An individual's identity is in turn shaped in part by sponsors of literacy who were influenced by different sponsors of literacy in their own social networks. These social networks or, more broadly, discourse communities, provide structure and balance to many individuals' lives today because individuals behave differently in different discourse communities. Barton and Hamilton refer to these communities as "distinct . . . domains of life" or "groups of people held together by their characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting and using written language" (11).

Essentially, the glue that binds these discourse communities together is particular behaviors during interaction. For instance, individuals in a religious community often attend church services, pray, sing, preach, and recite poems within the same space. Patricia Bizzell indicates how "Society is an aggregate of discourse communities that all share certain patterns of language-using, thinking conditioned by historical, cultural circumstances" (371). Society is a conglomerate of discourse communities, each comprised of several individuals with certain goals in mind. I am a member of primarily domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities who learns to not only function but also thrive at the place where these communities intersect. An individual is able to do so when these two factors in particular combine: the power of literacy as a "productive

resource" and the support of sponsors of literacy who foster the literacy development of the individual on the journey toward identity formation.

Sponsors of literacy validate the claim of outer-directed theorists that "universal, fundamental structures can't be taught; thinking and language use can never occur free of a social context that conditions them" (Bizzell 371). In other words, every individual, no matter how disadvantaged or advantaged his or her upbringing may have been, is shaped by his or her literacy experiences and learns to adapt to various discourse communities. This is why Bizzell describes the outward-directed model as one that sees the individual in such a way: "Individual has unequal access to different communities" (371). This unequal access is caused partly by individuals' upbringings as well as the level of exposure to different types of literacies, consequently shaping individual literacy practices and prompting individuals to participate in certain discourse communities. A context-based type of social interaction also encourages individuals from different cultural backgrounds to share ideas and speak across difference, oftentimes in discourse communities.

Mary Louise Pratt further pulls on the concept of the discourse community by defining her own concept—the "contact zone"—as a place "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (qtd. in Bizzell 462). Particularly in the case of cultures, which are oftentimes compared and contrasted with one another, Bizzell proposes that difference be negotiated and embraced so that individuals' stories—or in this case, literacy journeys—can be told and shared to prove as inspiring, unique sets of experiences others can relate to and learn from (463). Bizzell and Pratt emphasize multiculturalism in conversations about learning

or literacy, which illustrates the significance of sociocultural context pinpointed earlier in this literature review. To consider sociocultural context in acts of literacy—the telling of literacy narratives and autoethnographies, for example—is what all of these scholars are proposing for individuals to do when they map out and embed the discovery, intrigue, and details included within their unique literacy journeys.

By writing an autoethnography, I share a rich literacy journey saturated with moments in which I situate myself within culturally diverse discourse communities. Thereby, the sources discussing discourse communities and the concept of the "contact zone" become rich stores of knowledge to pull from when I write about how I becomes a contact zone. By considering discourse communities, literacy practices, sociocultural context, and the "contact zone" in relation to each other, I can determine how to properly describe her literacy experiences and the domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities within the autoethnography.

Autoethnography as Theory and Practice

This section defines autoethnography and its main components while simultaneously linking the theory to sociocultural context by using some of Carolyn Ellis's works to show that autoethnography can be used to articulate my literacy experiences. Ellis, a master of the theory and practice of autoethnography, effectively places the reader into a sociocultural context when relating her literacy experience through what she calls the autoethnographic method, "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis and Bochner 273). Autoethnography, framed by social and cognitive theories, goes beyond the literacy narrative by pushing the writer to be a participant and observer of self within a culture or situation. By becoming a participant and observer of self, this situates the audience members in a sociocultural context so that the events come alive in the reader's imagination.

Ellis defines the method as "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture" (37). Unlike the personal narrative, literacy narrative, or ethnography, autoethnography intertwines personal and cultural elements by placing the objective researcher as a character within the stories being told. The researcher acts as both participant and observer of self in a culture, making autoethnography the portrayal of an autoethnographic subject who is deeply steeped in a sociocultural context while telling about his or her identity formation in specific situations and places. Autoethnographies, then, are made up of multiple elements, including, but not limited to, epiphanies, concrete experiences linked to cultural identity, the personal, the interpersonal, memory, dialogue

(especially interior dialogue), reflection, rich descriptions, flashbacks, images, and significant details noted through keen observation.

Reflection is a particularly important part of the autoethnographic method because my portrayal of self heavily depends upon inner-reflective thought. In her book *A Rhetoric of Reflection*, Kathleen Blake Yancey goes into depth discussing how one can define reflection and its qualities. She begins by asserting that "reflection is a process we use to make meaning and make knowledge, a kind of meaning and knowledge unique to reflection given its intersectionality" (303-304). She indicates that "Reflection . . . is richly diverse and can look very different from one site to the next, from one perspective to another" (Yancey 318). Reflection can therefore provide me with valuable knowledge to describe my literacy experiences in an authentic, captivating way. As autoethnography is influenced by social and cognitive theories, this allows me to explore the places where cognition and reflective writing intersect. This emphasis on reflection, the above definition of autoethnography, and the list of autoethnography's major components allow me to properly organize my literacy experiences in a way that accurately conveys how literacy impacted my identity. I also build upon this background knowledge in the methods and methodology chapter that depicts in more detail exactly why the autoethnographic method is the best method to use for the purposes of this capstone project.

Wrap-Up

The topics of literacy, discourse communities, the "contact zone," and autoethnography are what make up the fabric of my literacy experiences. These sources accordingly inform the research completed for this autoethnography because it includes details about events and experiences that shaped and continue to shape my fluid identity. This identity—situated in the sociocultural context of the individuals she communicates with as a member of several discourse communities—includes information shared within those communities that spans from knowledge about religious texts to knowledge about scholarly research. The main aim is to show how literacy can be used as a powerful tool by applying the knowledge from these sources in a practical way by writing an autoethnography. The move from theoretical to practical application demonstrates that literacy has the power to transform the lives of not only those who tell the stories of their literacy journeys but also those who care to listen.

Methods and Methodology

In the literature review portion of this capstone project, I reveal the connections between the selection of sources about literacy that inform the writing of the autoethnographic portion of this project. Those connections—mainly concerned with linking literacy to networks of exchange or discourse communities, sociocultural context, and autoethnography—highlight the importance of autoethnography as it relates to my literacy journey. Therefore, autoethnography is the selected method that captures the personal and cultural experiences that intertwine throughout my life at home in the domestic discourse community, at Kennesaw State University in the academic discourse community, and at church in the religious discourse community. This method is particularly effective because it allows me to include information that answers the earlier-posed questions about how I situate myself within my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities as well as how I can best convey my unique literacy experiences. As both participant and observer of self within these three discourse communities, I can map out my literacy experiences in ways that allow me to present how literacy concerns have impacted my life, how literacy allows me to glean meaning from various social interactions, and how literacy provides the opportunity for me, the autoethnographic subject, to shape my identity. I have crafted a metaphor called the local bazaar that emphasized my literacy journey in a unique, accessible way.

The local bazaar metaphor is a particularly fitting example explaining how and why autoethnography is the best method for me to describe my literacy experiences. In

order to purchase products at a local bazaar, people travel from their homes and expect to meet with vendors, friends, and neighbors. Their conversations contain information about not only the products for sale but also other topics such as politics, culture, religion, history, and daily events from each other's lives. The individuals intersect in this location and engage in discourses about subjects important to them, and such interactions capture the essence of the local bazaar. Thus, the local bazaar becomes a kind of contact zone where discourse communities form, meet, and flourish. In the autoethnography, the audience sees how I embody the local bazaar, a place where her domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities combine to map out her literacy development over the specified time periods.

Autoethnography is a research method that combines self-reflection, rich descriptions, and memories in order to expound on the cultural significance of my both personal and cultural experiences. In order to properly frame my literacy experiences, I use elements of autoethnography, including reflection, memory, and rich descriptions to depict those experiences in the most authentic way possible. The autoethnography, then, is framed within a sociocultural context to accurately portray the social interactions within my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities. Some of my coursework concerning literacy and the literacy narrative builds on my existing knowledge of literacy as a field of study, particularly because the literacy narrative is a genre containing elements that overlap with elements of autoethnography. I now have a stronger understanding of literacy in relation to an individual's life; learning that literacy is connected to identity, upbringing, personal experiences, community, and an individual's overall development has helped me envision how I can craft my

autoethnography. Because literacy is an oftentimes-misunderstood concept, it is important to consider literacy within the context of an individual's lived experiences.

Literacy—a term that entails much more than simply the definition of reading and writing—has the ability to shape meaningful moments in a given individual's life, and that is what I hope to make clear within the autoethnography. A literacy narrative on its own cannot fully encapsulate how I intend to describe my literacy experiences because the genre does not view the research subject as both participant and observer of self, so meshing some elements of the literacy narrative with elements of the autoethnography allows me to fully unpack my literacy experiences. Therefore, autoethnography serves as the best method because it allows for me to reflect on literacy experiences that can then affect change in the audience (Bruner 74).

By serving as the framework for how I share my literacy experiences, autoethnography becomes a transformative tool by allowing me to see and re-see a given event from my past, "hold it in my mind, move it around, and see it from many different angles" (Custer 2). The ability to re-see past experiences is important because I can "interpret and reinterpret the fabric of my life's memories, thus constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing my identity" (Custer 3). A particularly important aspect of the autoethnography is that it allows for the research subject to transform not only past experiences but also the understanding of their own identity, which highlights the relationship between both personal and cultural elements that are fundamental to autoethnography (Bruner 74).

Additionally, autoethnography as a qualitative research method includes introspection and reflexivity, allowing for the audience to examine their own lives

depending on the feelings they experience as they read the autoethnography (Méndez 281). Even though there are advantages to writing an analytic autoethnography in which the focus "is directed towards objective writing," I plan to write an evocative autoethnography because the focus for my autoethnography in particular is introspection (Méndez 281). Autoethnography also requires the researcher to "retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or possessing a particular cultural identity," which hopefully leaves a transformative impact on the reader (Ellis et al. 276). Through what Ellis et al. call "evocative descriptions," I can reveal both personal and interpersonal details about the literacy experiences that shape my Ukrainian American cultural identity, thus allowing me to highlight particularly significant moments where science and art overlap (277).

They overlap because by studying the existing literature on autoethnography and describing my literacy experience in the most authentic way possible, I can craft an accurate autoethnographic account through the description of different discourse communities to be discussed later in this chapter in more detail. My participation in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing program has allowed me to explore composition and rhetoric in relation to creative writing through a variety of courses, opening opportunity to complete a qualitative research project with a creative writing component that fuses science and art—the autoethnography—while utilizing "concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness" in order to uncover the deeper meanings behind what happens in my social networks while adding valuable knowledge to the fields of composition and rhetoric as well as creative writing (*The Ethnographic I* 38). The social networks or networks of exchange where I interact with

individuals from specific discourse communities gave me the chance to make those introspective, inner-reflective moves that begin to shape my cultural identity.

Those networks of exchange act as important points in my literacy journey where I re-discover pieces of my Ukrainian American identity. Chapter 14 titled "Vernacular Literacies" from David Barton and Mary Hamilton's work *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community* unpacks the idea of social networks with ethnography because the authors underscore "reciprocal networks of exchange" and "networks of support" (254). These two phrases highlight the fact that networks are what make writing autoethnography possible, as autoethnography is heavily dependent upon the social interactions and communication between the research subject and others. Carolyn Ellis hints at this when she affirms, "I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller" (*Revision* 13). She thereby accentuates the connection between the personal and the cultural, which is made possible through social interactions.

As an example of that connection, Ellis embeds an autoethnographic excerpt in which she is at her high school reunion speaking to Bobby (a former black classmate), and she wonders what happened to Grady (also a former black classmate), who is not at the reunion. Ellis is able to distance herself enough from the situation in order to analyze how her social networks of support were different than that of her former black classmates. There is evidence of this analysis as Ellis captures an inner-reflective moment in her narration: "I experience the contradictory pulls of several worlds—my family and our losses, the high school and small town of my childhood, and the urban university in Florida that I now call home"; further down, she asks herself, "how much of this

community is still a part of me? . . . How different is my life from their lives?" (*Revision* 38). Here, Ellis reflects about how she was a part of a certain social network and how those relationships continue to shape her identity.

Social networks as "webs" or "systems of communication" contain links that are not always positive (or possibly limiting), revealing the power of literacy as an identity-shaping tool while giving me room to reflect about how nobody's social networks are exactly the same. This was the case in Ellis's experience when she reflected on the differences between her world and Bobby's world. Bobby's "way of life" or "way of doing" made his literacy development unlike that of Ellis's. Literacy can therefore be traced as a phenomenon that affects individuals' lives because all of the elements that make up literacy—artifacts, events, development, and sponsors of literacy—are a part of the greater sociocultural context that allows discourse communities to thrive (Akkinaso 154).

Discourse communities play a significant role in ensuring that literacy experiences are remembered and shared. Barton and Hamilton's interpretation of discourse communities as "distinct . . . domains of life" is valid here because as the research subject, I can identify the "how" and the "why" that reveal the influence behind my literacy practices in my autoethnography. Ellis's qualitative approach to autoethnography also aids me in unpacking what Barton and Hamilton term the "threads of literacy practices" that allow me to successfully function in the discourse communities in which I participate ("Ethnography in Practice" 72). Taking the autoethnographic approach to narrating my literacy journey allow me to "understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making

meaning in our lives" (*The Autoethnographic I* 25). Literacy in relation to the social world is thereby be the driving force in the formation of my identity that unfolds in my autoethnography.

My autoethnographic text features mainly elements of memory, dialogue, epiphanies, and inner reflection because I am telling the reader about how I my dual identity was formed through social interactions in three discourse communities. Ellis's works prove useful because I now know how to approach writing an autoethnography based on the information about the method coupled with its practical application through those elements. I am able to explore how I function at home, at church, and in school while also incorporating the crucial networks or communities in which I use those languages. I use the elements of autoethnography to describe my literacy experiences in my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities.

When observing myself at age eleven in the domestic discourse community, I discuss how I acquired the Ukrainian language by writing about the process of transcribing certain chapters of the Ukrainian Bible onto sheets of notebook paper. I reflect on the challenge of forming certain letters and how I felt while writing Ukrainian words in the most authentic way possible by using memory and rich details to properly capture the physical surroundings and my internal struggle with learning how to write in Ukrainian. When observing myself at age twenty-two in the academic community, I reflect on two of the most vivid literacy activities from my time in the MAPW program: the process of writing a rhetorical analysis, and receiving feedback on a poem during a poetry workshop while in a poetry writing course. More specifically, I utilize interior dialogue and inner reflection while I look back at myself during those two literacy events,

especially since writing is a recursive activity that requires introspection and deep analysis. I embed moments in which I observe myself as an emerging scholar thinking about the writing process of both choosing the particular words that I used in the rhetorical analysis and the process of welcoming critique on my poem.

Lastly, when observing myself at age twenty-three in the religious discourse community, I reveal how conducting choir has shaped my cultural identity by observing myself conducting a choral hymn during church service. In this way, I am able to view myself as choir conductor as if I were an audience member sitting on one of the church pews listening to the choral hymn. Positioning myself as an audience member allows me to insert important details about specific sights and sounds produced during the performance. I also describe in rich detail my experience while participating in a prayer with fellow youth members of the Slavic community by reflecting on the setting, the atmosphere, the youth leader, and what was occurring during the prayer in order to transport the audience member into the church. By evaluating the experiences from these three discourse communities through self-observation, I hope to write an autoethnography that is an authentic, accurate portrayal of my unique literacy journey as a woman with a Ukrainian American cultural identity.

Autoethnography

Sticking to My Roots: Establishing a Ukrainian American Cultural Identity

My parents emigrated from Ukraine to the United States twenty-seven years ago; my family (dad, mom, my sister Larissa, and me) moved from an apartment complex in Roswell, Georgia, to the home in Woodstock, Georgia, where I grew up—a pastel yellow house built in 1869 sitting on just over an acre of land. The house was plain and old, and the only way to enter from the front was to go through the garage with no walls and a tin roof. This led to the kitchen with its sliding glass doors, light yellow linoleum floor, and wallpapered walls. I often sat down to do crafts at my simple wooden desk that was parallel to Larissa's large metal desk. Sometimes, I would lay down to rest on the king-sized bed that I shared with Larissa and stare at the uneven wood panels on the ceiling that matched the wooden panels of the walls, except that the walls were covered in colorful floral wallpaper while the ceiling was simply painted white. I spent much of my time outside because my mom and dad made it a priority to maintain our garden that filled almost every inch of our one acre, and so every year, we had an abundance of fruits and vegetables to harvest: tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, sorrel, blueberries, figs, cherries, scuppernongs, and pears. I remember spending much of my childhood in the garden watering plants, ripping out weeds, checking for pests, and gorging myself on the crisp, fresh produce.

Each day when the bus dropped me off at home from school, I would quickly complete my homework assignments and ask to play with my neighbor's daughter,

Rebecca. When my parents approved, Rebecca and I would spend time playing mainly outdoors near my house. Our favorite activity was having a competition to see who could climb to the top of the old, withered pecan tree more quickly. I would race up the tree and scratch my knees up along the way. What excited me most was that the wind became stronger the higher I climbed, and I cherished the moments when I could catch the slightest breeze to escape the thick Georgia summer heat, letting wisps of my blonde hair glide across my shoulders.

Although mom and dad preferred for Larissa and me to live a semi-isolated life involving mainly events such as going to the grocery store, tending to the garden, and attending church services, we lived in a community surrounded by neighbors like Rebecca's family who identified as American. My neighbors enjoyed their privacy; they all had pets of some sort (cats, dogs, and horses); and they were always friendly and kind. Most importantly, though, their primary language was English. Despite living in a society with neighbors and friends who identified as American, I identified as Ukrainian because that was the language I used to communicate with my family. Because I was constantly surrounded by individuals who spoke English and lived an American lifestyle, my parents were vigilant about ensuring that my mother tongue, Ukrainian, was the only language spoken within the walls of our antique, wallpapered home. When I started going to elementary school, I acquired English at school and started speaking English at home as well, which was problematic in my parents' perspective because they thought I would forget the Ukrainian language if I didn't speak it at home.

I vividly remember coming home one day from elementary school and standing in front of the living room door, saying to my dad in English, "Open the door." He looked at

me with confused eyes and furrowed eyebrows. At that point, I was thinking to myself, "It's such a simple thing. Why won't he just twist the knob?" But my dad didn't understand what I was saying until I opened the door to the living room myself. From then on, there might as well have been "SPEAK UKRAINIAN ONLY" signs plastered all over the wallpapered walls and old doors because my sister and I *had* to follow this rule. Otherwise, my parents would not respond to us unless we spoke in Ukrainian. I immediately started translating English words into Ukrainian before speaking so that my parents would understand. This newly implemented rule affected my behavior because I was now hyperaware of the language I had to speak at home. A few weeks later, my parents explained in a worried tone that they were trying to help my sister and me value or *цінити* and save or *берегти* the Ukrainian language from being lost or forgotten because it is part of what makes us who we are; in other words, my parents were telling us that the Ukrainian language partly shapes our dual cultural identity: a Ukrainian American identity.

The Ukrainian language—spoken almost exclusively in Ukraine—is an East Slavic phonetic language with an alphabet composed of thirty-three Cyrillic letters. According to the web magazine *Ukrainian American Media*, "Between 1992 and 1997, a total of 107,916, or an annual average of 18,000 people born in Ukraine immigrated legally to the US" (*Ukrainian American Media*). The number of Ukrainians in the United States is not concentrated in any one particular state: the East and West coasts contain the most Ukrainian communities. For instance, the five states with the highest concentration of Ukrainians are New York, Pennsylvania, California, New Jersey, and Illinois (*Améredia*). Resettlement to different states does not occur often, and when it does, most

move to the five states listed above or, in rare cases, to a state in the Midwest such as Minnesota or Missouri. In contrast, the number of Russian communities that socialize with Ukrainians across the US is much greater due to the eastern European countries that were a part of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991.

I now believe the implementation of the "speak Ukrainian only" rule served two main, practical purposes: to ensure my mother tongue was never forgotten after my parents emigrated and to ensure everybody in the household would always understand each other. There were times when I would try to test the rule, but my parents were so serious that I was forced to overcome laziness and translate words from English to Ukrainian. My tactic was to craft short replies to short questions or statements in English because I didn't want them to notice that I was trying to use English in the house. For example, if my parents asked me how school went that day or *Як прошла школа сьогоні,* I would attempt to reply in English with "School was good. Math was hard though."

Even though I didn't realize that a language barrier existed between my dad and me in that "open-the-door" moment, I have come to realize that I was fortunate because I had acquired the English language at public school while my parents didn't have the same opportunity to do so. I acquired English mainly through social interactions with a group of close friends at my elementary school. Those interactions occurred either in the cafeteria while we ate lunch and had milk-chugging contests, in the classroom while we learned about topics such as reading and mathematics, or at the playground during recess. I recall having to get a filling at the dentist and returning to school during recess with a numb cheek. Even though the numbness in my face made me feel a little embarrassed, I

still decided to play “tag” with my three best friends: Annie, Kimmy, and Wyatt. The premise of the game was to try and not get tagged, but if that happened, the goal of the tagged person was to try and tag somebody else by tapping them on the arm or back and yelling, “Tag, you’re it!” We all knew Annie would probably not get tagged because she was the most agile, but I didn’t care because the feeling of excitement as I pressed Annie’s shoulder and called out “Tag, you’re it!” was more important to me than the condition of my cheek at that moment.

English was much easier for me to use because I went to a public elementary school where I had friends like Annie and kind teachers who helped me learn. Therefore, to make sure that I learned how to read and write in Ukrainian, my parents paid for a tutor. From when I was five to ten years old, my cousins, sister, and I took Ukrainian language classes at my Uncle Nikolai’s house in Roswell, Georgia. Uncle Nikolai and his family emigrated to the US at the same time as the rest of the Kovalchuk family, and as kids, we were happy to have the chance to learn together in his house. My teacher’s name was Totya Oksana, and she had worked as a Ukrainian language teacher in Ukraine before emigrating to the US at the same time as my parents.

All of our parents would drive to Uncle Nikolai’s house for us to receive one-hour lessons from Totya Oksana. She sat in a wooden chair as we (the small kids group comprised of my cousins, Liliya, Stephan, and me) sat on the floor with our alphabet books (see Fig. 1). Without the help of technology, we happily learned new letters, wrote them down, pronounced them, and crafted words beginning with those letters in both print and cursive. My mom and dad were familiar with the *буквар* (see Fig. 1) that was standardized across Ukraine aside from minor changes in the embedded exercises. Thus,

after the classes, my parents would help my sister and me understand our separate assigned homework because I was in the “small kids” class (ages five to ten) while my sister was in the “big kids” class (ages eleven to sixteen). These exercises were intended to help us learn how to write in Ukrainian print rather than cursive. Each letter was accompanied with letters the vowels that accompanied that letter. For instance, in Fig. 1, the letter Б (the equivalent to the sound of the letter “B” in English) could be followed by the vowels “a,” “y,” “e,” “i,” and “o” to spell words such as *білка* (squirrel, pronounced “bilka”), *банка* (can, pronounced “banka”), and *бант* (bow, pronounced “bont”).

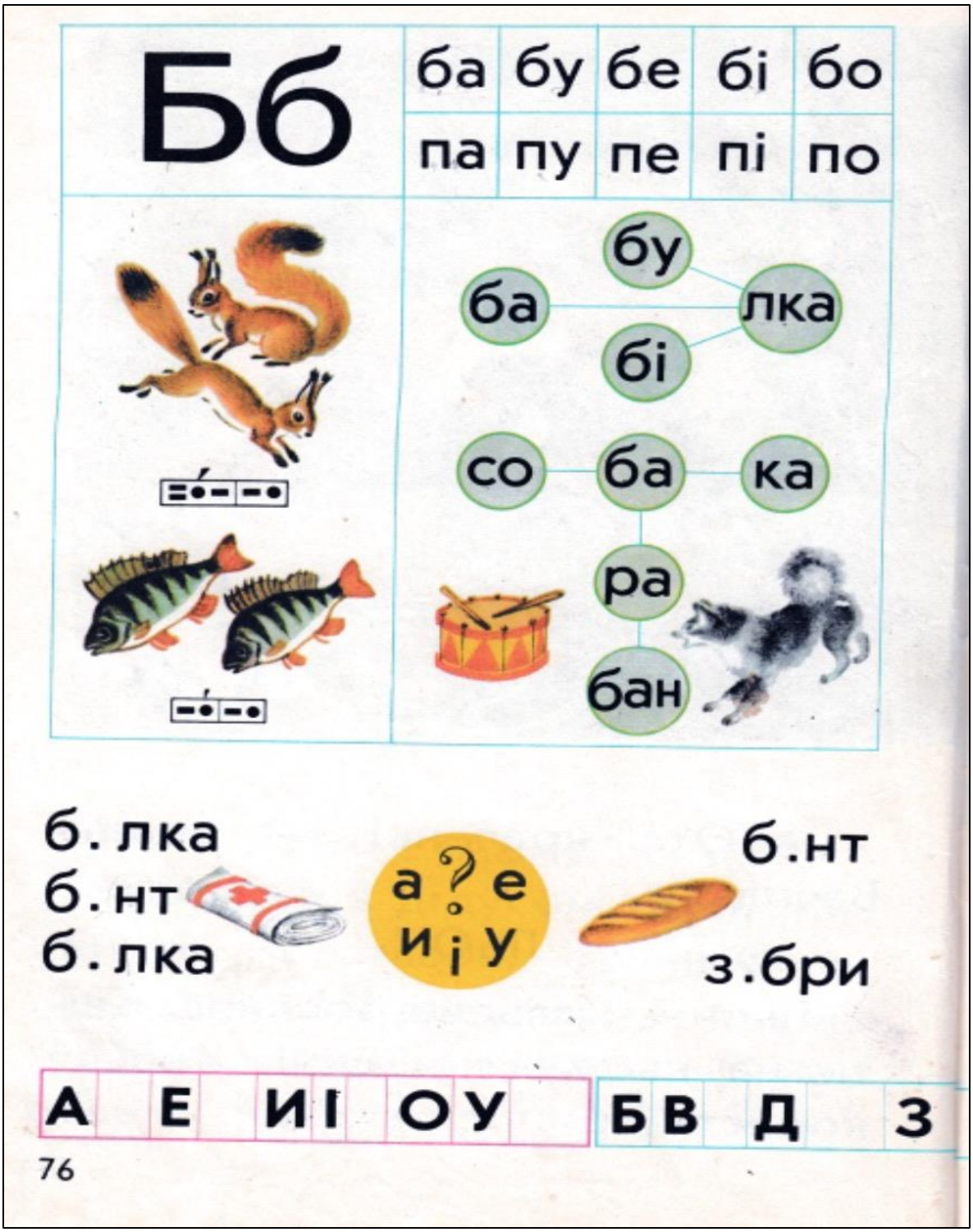


Fig. 1. Page 76 from the *буквар* or Ukrainian alphabet book showing examples of how to use the letter “Б” of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet.

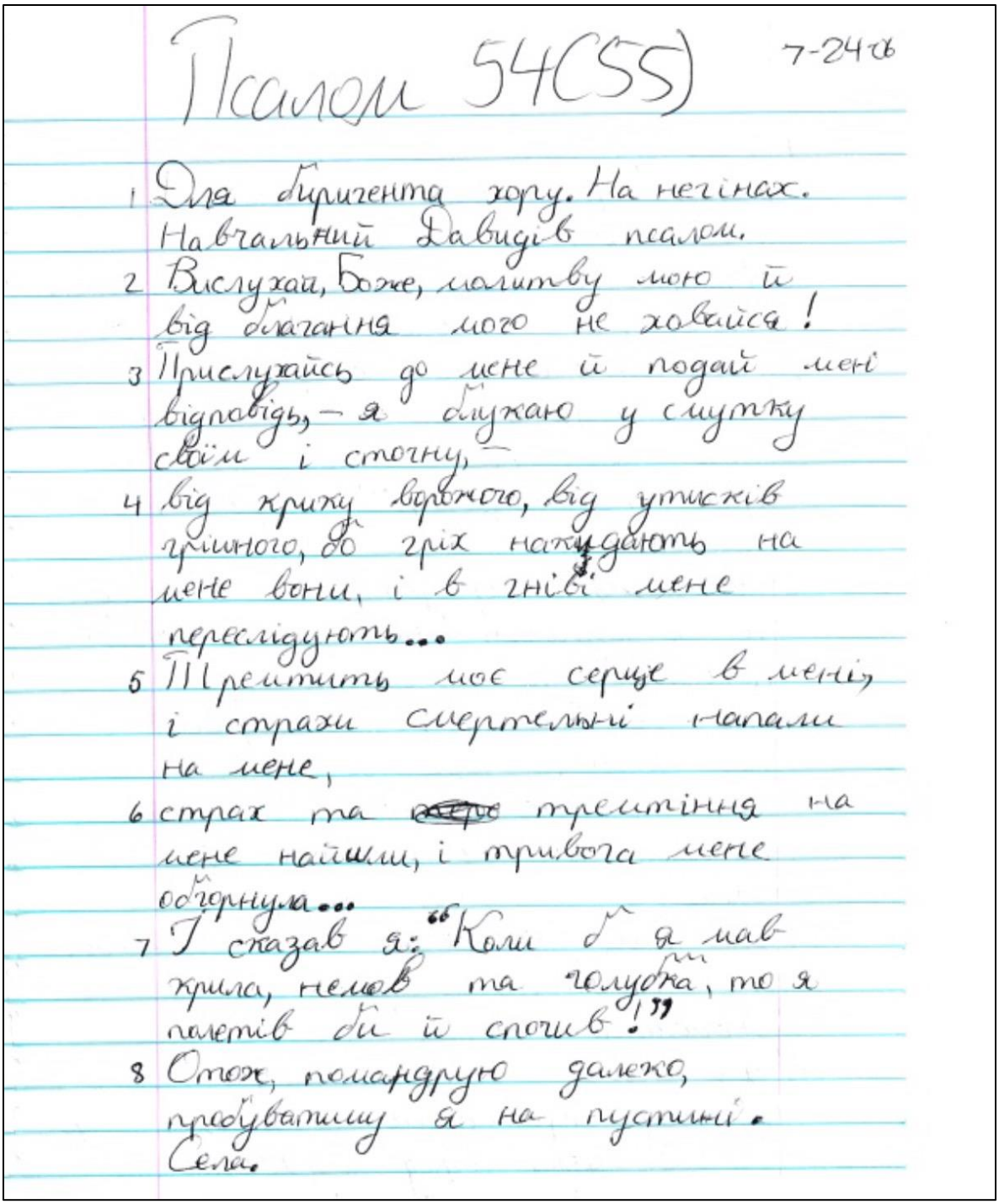
In order to help me better understand the alphabet and how to properly write and read in Ukrainian, my parents would explain the subtle differences between specific letters in the alphabet to ensure proper pronunciation and spelling. For example, since there is no hard "g" sound in the Ukrainian language, they clarified the pronunciation difference between words like *голодний* (hungry) that has a heavy "h" sound and *холодний* (cold) that has a soft "h" sound—we all laughed when I initially couldn't pronounce the difference properly. In a similar way, the letters "щ" and "ц" look similar but are pronounced "sh-ch" and "ts," respectively.

Those days of learning seemed monotonous and tiring, but I remember thinking how fascinating it was to learn how to write words in a language that the majority of Americans didn't understand. I called the act of writing those Ukrainian words "cool." I thought it was cool that I could switch between speaking English and Ukrainian without struggling to communicate with others and that I could write and read a language with letters that were completely different than the English alphabet's Latin letters. Being fluent in speaking, reading, and writing in Ukrainian makes me now reflect on how the intricacies and nuances of a language are crucial to helping people effectively communicate with each other. I then became obsessed with learning to read and especially write in Ukrainian.

At age ten, I would compare Ukrainian letters to English ones, oftentimes giggling at how the lowercase Ukrainian "н" (pronounced "n" in English) looked like a tiny version of the capitalized English letter "H," or how the capitalized Ukrainian "Р" (pronounced "r" in English) looked exactly like the capitalized English letter "P." I would quietly sound out the pronunciation differences for fun both at home in my room and in

school during reading or grammar classes after I had completed the activities or during recess when I just wanted to walk around the track by myself instead of playing with my friends in order to have quiet time to think hard about pronouncing those words. At home while in my room, I would sit at my wooden desk with a green plastic covering, take out a sheet of notebook paper, and write down letters I struggled pronouncing such as "Г" and "Х." I would think of different words that I knew the spelling of and attempt to pronounce the deep, throaty sound of the "Г" in words like *гриби* (mushrooms) and *гуси* (geese), and the soft, light sound of the "Х" in words like *хата* (house) and *хліб* (bread). I would write these words down and trace each word with my index finger as I sounded out the words while repeating the first letter a few times before saying the word: "Г-г-г-г-гуси, х-х-х-х-хата."

These personal learning activities started after my parents had Larissa and me complete certain writing exercise each summer. The following were my dad's specific instructions: *Якщо ви хочете гуляти з подругами літом, перекладайте Українську Біблію на бумагу. Одна бумага це і перед і зад*. ("If you want to hang out with your friends during summer, transcribe the Ukrainian Bible onto sheets of notebook paper. One sheet counts only if you write on the front and the back.") My dad explained to us that transcribing the Bible in particular would help us learn more biblical knowledge so that we could understand church sermons and hymns. Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 below represent one full entry:


Псалом 54(55) 7-24 ов

1 Для диригента хору. На негінах.
Навчальний Давидів псалом.
2 Вислухай, Боже, молитву мою й
від благання мого не ховайся!
3 Прислухайсь до мене й подай мені
відповідь, — я блукаю у смутку
своїм і стогну,
4 від крику ворожого, від утисків
грішного, бо гріх накидають на
мене вони, і в гніві мене
переслідують...
5 Тремтить моє серце в мені,
і страхи смертельні напали
на мене,
6 страх та ~~жах~~ тремтіння на
мене найшли, і тривога мене
обгорнула...
7 І сказав я: "Коли б я мав
крила, немов та голубка, то я
полетів би й спочив!"
8 Отож, помандрую далеко,
пробуватиму я на пустині.
Села.

Fig. 2. Front of sample entry in which I transcribed Psalm 54 at age 11 from the Ukrainian Bible onto notebook paper, dated 24 July 2006 (*Біблія*, Ps. 54.1-8).

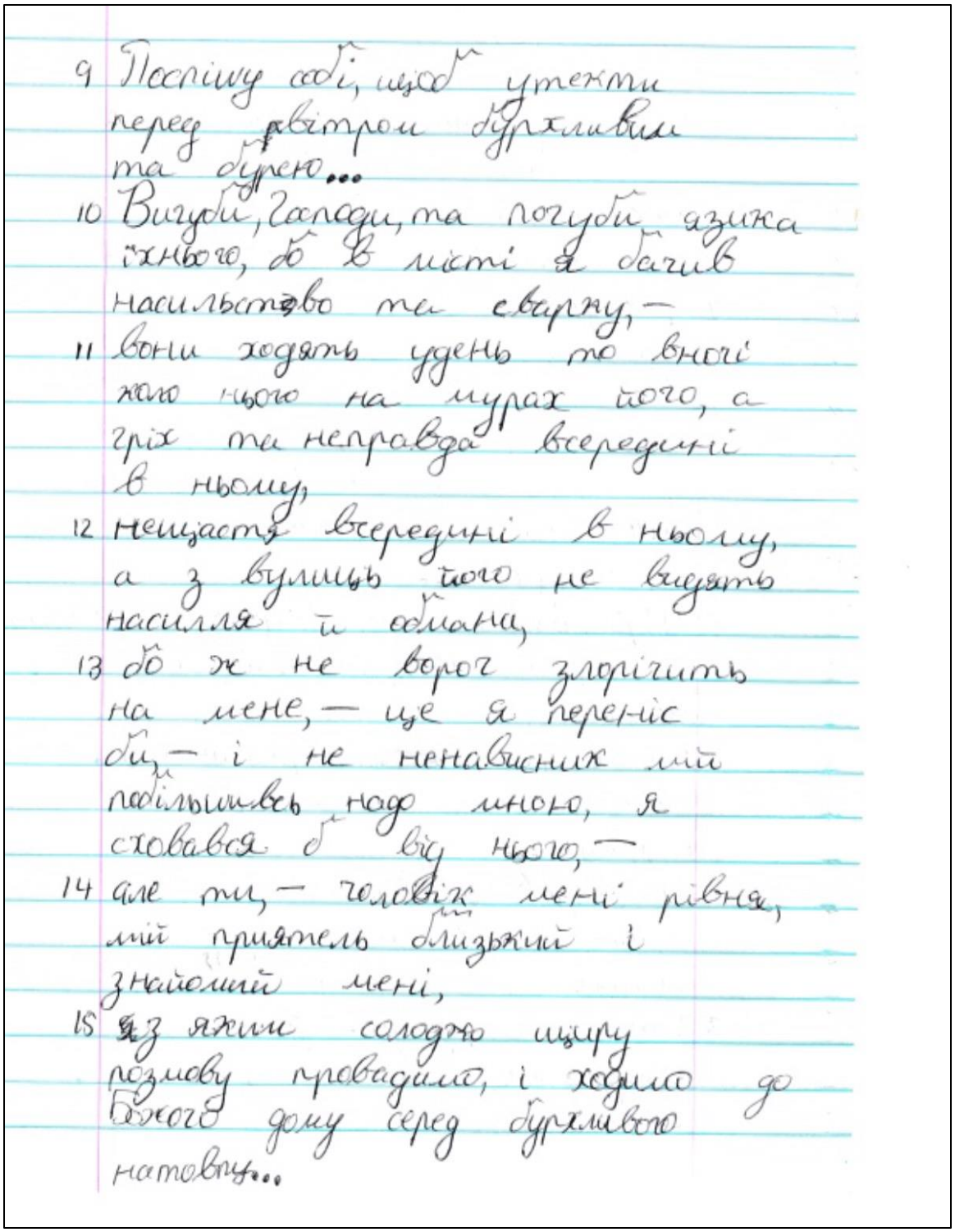

9 Поспішу собі, щоб утекти
перед вітром бурхливим
та бурею...
10 Вигуби, Господи, та погуби язика
їхнього, бо в місті я бачив
насильство та сварку,—
11 вони ходять удень по вночі
коло нього на мурах його, а
гріх та неправда всередині
в ньому,
12 нещасть всередині в ньому,
а з вулиць його не видять
насилля і обману,
13 бо ж не ворог злорічить
на мене,— це я переніс
би,— і не ненависник мій
підбивався надо мною, я
сховався б від нього,—
14 але ти,— чоловік мені рівня,
мій приятель близький і
знайомий мені,
15 з яким солодку пораду
розмову провадив, і ходив до
Божого дому серед бурхливого
натовпу...

Fig. 3. Back of sample entry in which I transcribed Psalm 54 at age 11 from the Ukrainian Bible onto notebook paper, dated 24 July 2006 (Ps. 54.9-15).

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 are literacy artifacts representing the sociocultural context surrounding my literacy development growing up in a domestic community (home and relatives' homes), a religious community in which everybody spoke Ukrainian (church), and an academic community (school, in which everybody spoke English). During the transcription process, I wanted to hold onto my Ukrainian identity partly because of my parents' upbringing as former citizens of a country that functioned according to the laws of the Soviet Union. Due to the persecution of Pentecostals in Ukraine during the former USSR, the Bible was not a book you wanted to read in public. And so when my dad told me the story about how in elementary school he was made fun of because he was Christian, I felt privileged that I could handwrite words from the Bible onto notebook paper without worrying about somebody jeering at what in my eyes had become a sacred text full of complex narratives, beautiful poetic language, and constructive moral parables. I enjoyed transcribing chapters from the book of Psalms because of the recurring themes of victory and praise. For example, the first verse of Psalm 134 reads, "Поблагословіть оце Господа, всі раби Господні, що по ночах у домі Господньому ви стоїте!" ("Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord!") (*New Revised Standard Version,* Ps. 134.1).

I also learned to preserve my Ukrainian identity through transcription of children's stories in the English language, but I interpreted that experience in a different way. Those stories—including *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast,* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*—were printed in hardcover books in a series of classic American story collections that my parents would purchase for me at Costco Wholesale on Sundays after church service. I was fascinated with American culture even though my parents didn't

often purchase many classic American children's stories or books for me. This fact certainly didn't make my childhood any less enjoyable because my elementary school had a well-stocked library of books that I borrowed from regularly. In school, I would check out books from the library by skimming the shelves that were packed with rows and rows of books, looking for one in the genre of mystery because that was my favorite. I would then walk up to the librarian at the front and hand her my chosen book so that she could scan its barcode. The allotted time for me to borrow the book, two weeks, was certainly enough time for me to read it from cover to cover. I craved knowledge and enjoyed expressing my creative imagination primarily through reading and, when possible, transcribing stories.

During my primary and secondary years of schooling, I still considered myself Ukrainian and behaved according to my parents' rules even when I was at school; at home, I thought in English but communicated in Ukrainian because I spent most of my days at school communicating with native English speakers. Thereby, when I was transcribing the Ukrainian Bible, I handwrote Ukrainian words onto sheets of notebook paper. In contrast, when I was transcribing those children's stories, I typed English words on a computer into Microsoft Word. I would transcribe the Bible by handwriting in Ukrainian cursive with either a pencil or pen. The wooden pencils, plastic pens, and white notebook paper with its red horizontal lines for separation and blue marginal lines allowed me to transcribe the Bible and therefore maintain and honor my Ukrainian heritage and religious practices. When I began transcribing children's stories, I would open a blank Microsoft Word document and type each story a few words at a time on my computer—a gray Sony computer with a loud gray keyboard and a large gray console

about sixteen inches high and six inches wide. My parents encouraged me to transcribe children's stories on the computer for the sake of learning to adapt to advancing technologies, but by ten years old—whether they were aware of it or not—they had already laid the foundation for what I now consider my primary, national identity: Ukrainian. This is significant because even though I wasn't born in Ukraine, I was able to retain my Ukrainian roots and develop my passion for writing through the process of transcribing those texts, which prepared me in advance to write college-level essays such as rhetorical analyses that I discuss in the next section.

A Re-Vision of My Writing Process:

Writing A Rhetorical Analysis on Helene Cixous's The Laugh of the Medusa

It's March 2018, and as I sit in a classroom in Kennesaw State University's English Building waiting for the class *Context, Style, & Audience in Professional Writing* taught by Dr. M. Todd Harper to begin, my mind is full of commotion and chaos. The material is so complex: my classmates and I are trying to rhetorically analyze Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*. There's a long, wide gray table with an overabundance of chairs, and Dr. Harper is at the head of the table with his laptop, guiding us through the process of analyzing Cixous's beautifully complicated mind. It's an anti-theoretical text, and the writing is so rhetorically astute that it's difficult to fully understand what Cixous is trying to convey. Analysis begins with a close reading of the text, and then each of us share our personal interpretations of Cixous's words. For example, Cixous declares how "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (1526). As a class, we pick apart what Cixous means by "change," "subversive thought," and "social and cultural structures" in order to understand the significance of embodiment in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. I remember one classmate mentioned why it was so revolutionary for her to use words such as "bisexual" while discussing how women should write with their bodies. Another classmate replied that considering the historico-cultural context of when she was writing is crucial to properly interpret what Cixous means because she stresses that women are a part of a "regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions

into a single battlefield" (1529). As a class, we come to the general consensus that Cixous favors equality between women and men in the world of intellectual discourse.

We then start discussing modern-day stereotypes to try and imagine what Cixous was battling against as she wrote this text. Dr. Harper draws a T-chart on the board labeled "MEN" on one side and "WOMEN" on the other. After the class creates a list of binaries, the words seem to jump off of the board and spark a lively debate between the three men and five women students in the course. It is then that I start thinking, "Why didn't Cixous just use writing as the vehicle to explode these binaries like Derrida did with his concept of *différance*? Why did she add the body into the mix?" It is at this moment that one of my classmates asks during this debate, "What makes these [the list of binaries] different than the words we use to describe stereotypes between men and women?" I thought to myself, "The body is key for Cixous." I replied to my classmate, "For Cixous, the body is physical and figurative, so you can't think of what we've listed as separate words because then, yes, those words are stereotypical labels. The body makes it so that we see them as pairs, as binaries." I then quickly jotted down the following onto a sheet of paper (see Fig. 4):

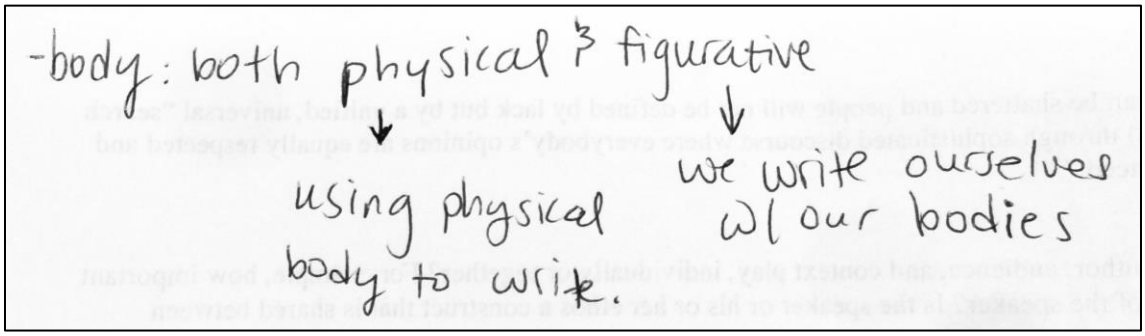


Fig. 4. Notes about the role of the body in Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*.

After class ended, I walked the half-mile to my car that was parked in the parking deck through the muggy afternoon air. As usual, both elevators were out of order, so I

had to walk up twelve grimy, gum-smothered flights of stairs to reach the wide expanse of parking spaces on the sixth floor where I had parked my car. I started thinking of my identity as a twenty-two-year-old woman writer living in a male-dominated Western society. I realized I was already smashing the harmful binaries that Cixous discusses in her text by attending the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program at Kennesaw State University (KSU). I was determined to do nothing else that night but start writing the third rhetorical analysis of the semester. In each rhetorical analysis, we needed to explain not only how the writer of the text was persuading the audience but also how the writer used pathetic, logical, and ethical appeals to do so. I wanted to start this third analysis without planning. I made myself a cup of herbal tea, sat in bed, slipped my legs under the covers, placed my laptop onto my lap, and opened up a blank Word document. I tried forming a thesis about how Cixous uses writing to prove her point that writing is a spectacular tool for intellectual development, but as I continued to write, I kept getting stuck throughout the process of drafting. I remember smiling as I flashed back to that aha moment in class and pulled out those notes that I had quickly scribbled down: "Yes, the body and the binaries." It took five drafts to craft the thesis statement that eventually became the thesis statement for the final version of the rhetorical analysis: "This paper will analyze how writing goes beyond a form of communication and becomes a method of empowerment through the smashing of binaries and the use of the body."

From that point forward, I had to lean on my traditional method of writing academic essays by creating an organizational structure rather than writing without an outlined structure as many successful writers do. Otherwise, I would spend way too much

time going off on random tangents. The first question I asked myself was, “What are the topics of my body paragraphs?”

For this essay, that wouldn’t work because there were no specific topics I wanted to cover. I had to link writing to something, but I couldn’t figure out that “something.” I distracted myself by eating almonds and making myself another cup of tea. I wanted to think of a title, but I couldn’t think of one, so I decided to email Dr. Harper and ask for approval concerning the still-disorganized ideas I had for the essay. I was so happy when he replied the following because I had no “Plan B” at that moment (see Fig. 5):

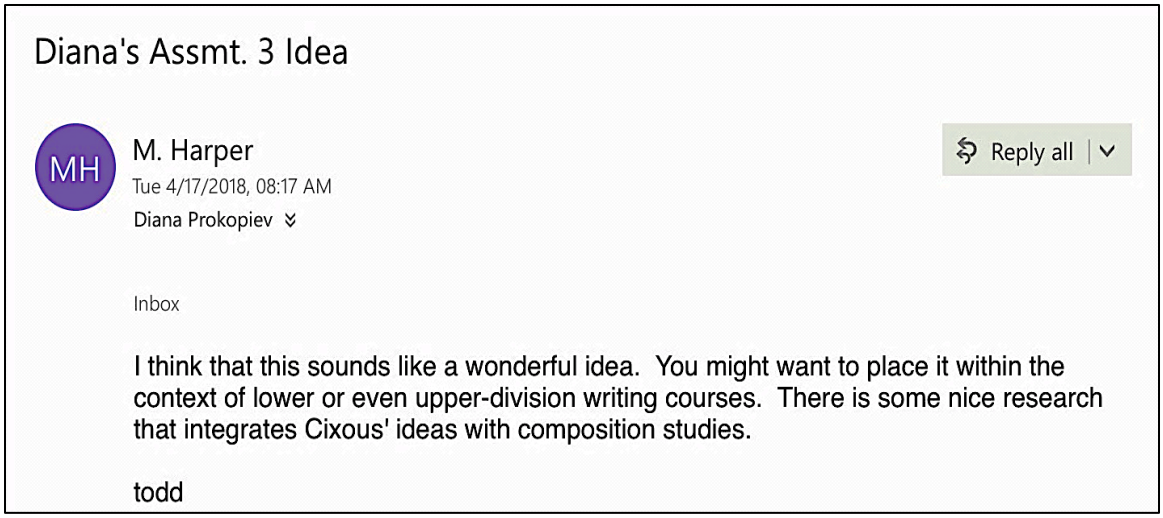


Fig. 5. Dr. Harper’s email reply to the idea for my third rhetorical analysis on Cixous’s *The Laugh of the Medusa*.

The day after receiving Dr. Harper’s email response (see Fig. 5), I arrived home, had dinner, and thought of the composition-based topic that I would tie to writing and the explosion of the binaries. I ran into my room frantically—almost slipping on the beige carpet, afraid I would forget my idea. I pulled my laptop from my backpack and typed out the phrase “collaborative learning” at the top of the document. Later that the week, I made an appointment to visit Dr. Harper in his office to discuss the progress of my essay

and how to best incorporate collaborative learning into the rhetorical analysis. The smell of old books wafted through the air as I walked into his office and sat across from him on one of the dark wooden chairs. I relished the fact that everything in his office was made of wood—the chairs, his desk, and the bookcases—because it made me feel like I was in an old home full of history and untold stories. When he started providing feedback on what was my second draft at the time, I proposed the idea of connecting the body to collaborative pedagogy. We picked through the different aspects of collaborative learning, especially its power to shape identities, and I wrote down the following bullet point: "Collaborative pedagogy: social change because writing has the power to shape our own identities, voices; breaking through homogeneous and into the heterogeneous." I had to write and rewrite my body paragraphs while at the same time incorporating outside sources to deepen the analysis. I lost count of how many times I wrote and revised those paragraphs because I initially couldn't figure out a way to unpack the text in a way that would provide smooth transitions between each topic.

I came home that day after school and determined I could now confidently establish a title. After a few failed attempts, I eventually came up with the final version of the title: "Exploding the Masculine/Feminine Binary through Writing and Collaborative Learning: A Rhetorical Analysis of Helene Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*." As I was organizing the order in which I would analyze the ideas for this analysis, I reflected back on the process of writing academic essays during my graduate experience in the MAPW program. I had learned to read, evaluate, and write about academic texts using academic language, and I could learn this skill only by surrounding myself with scholarly knowledge. By attending Kennesaw State University and writing these academic texts, I

started to consider how I was not only Ukrainian but also American. My voluntary entrance into the academic world fused my primary identity (Ukrainian) to my secondary but equally important identity (American), resulting in a harmonious unity of the two in order to establish my dual cultural identity.

I then started listing out the order of topics and expanding the notes from my meeting with Dr. Harper: binaries, *différance*, homogeneity versus heterogeneity, becoming bisexual as a writer, and collaborative pedagogy. I at least now had an idea of how to structure my body paragraphs. That's usually how my writing process would turn out when writing academic essays. I moved forward with one idea, lost track and swerved to the left, lost track and swerved to the right, and eventually ended up on the right track after making some minor and also some major adjustments. For instance, I had started discussing binaries before introducing Derrida's concept of *différance*. This was a huge mistake that resulted in a lot of backtracking because the foundation and source of the binaries was not introduced, but I had already written three paragraphs about binaries. After making this major slip and a few minor slips during the process, I was proud of the final product (see Appendix A).

This welcome challenge helped me appreciate the complexities of rhetorical texts and the care that it takes to write in an academic language—a language that is learned over an extended period of time in the context of an academic institution. Stepping into the MAPW program at age twenty-one and defining myself as a professional writer at age twenty-two made me feel accomplished. I was a Ukrainian that had been shaped by my education and the professors who had fostered that educational experience in order to make my time at KSU worthwhile. I was a Ukrainian who had become a Ukrainian

American partly through academic writing. I had moved past transcribing texts and was now rhetorically analyzing them, which required more complex, in-depth thinking. In a different class elaborated on in the next narrative, I would soon take on the challenge of learning to give and receive feedback.

Embracing My Membership in the Academic Discourse Community:

Receiving Feedback on My Short Story "Angus Bruiser"

"This is the biggest class I've ever been a part of in this program," I thought to myself as I sat in the Fiction Writing course in KSU's MAPW program and counted twenty classmates. We were all providing and receiving feedback on our third and final short story of the semester. I always got a little nervous when it was my turn to give feedback because I had never critiqued other writers' short stories before; in fact, it was only in this course that I began to develop a fiction writing vocabulary that allowed me to properly analyze short stories. Each of us seemed laid back and calm sitting around the set of light gray tables arranged in a large square, but I'm sure I wasn't the only one who was nervous when their turn came to give constructive criticism. And despite my lack of experience in participating in creative writing workshops, I was thankful that Dr. Bill Rice—a kind, honest professor with a wonderful sense of humor—helped us gain a proper understanding of the main elements of fiction: plot and structure; characterization; theme; point of view; symbol, allegory, and fantasy; and humor and irony.

Throughout the semester, I felt out of place when having to support my claims (my feedback to other student writers) with evidence (using the writer's words) even though I was used to doing so in academic essays. More specifically, I felt like my classmates were a few steps ahead of me during these workshops because they had learned the tricks of the trade and had not only participated in the workshop experience but also authored multiple creative writing texts of their own, which made my twenty-two-year-old-self feel less confident at times during class. I always had to be hyperaware of learning and retaining new vocabulary ever since I started attending KSU in August

2013 because I oftentimes resorted to thinking in Ukrainian before speaking in English. When providing feedback, though, that technique wouldn't work because I couldn't possibly think in Ukrainian and form cohesive English speech fast enough.

My heart started to pound as I realized it was my turn to justify the written feedback I had given to a classmate's story that was written as a series of vignettes. The previous week, I had written the following comment about her story: "I really enjoy the tension you build and the complications you provide, and so maybe spending a bit more time on the most important sections/scenes would make the story even more interesting and more detailed." I started explaining my comments, and when I reached this comment, my mind blanked, and I awkwardly pieced together what I meant by "spending a bit more time" on certain portions. I was embarrassed because of my inexperience but determined to do the best I could at providing useful comments even though I swiftly had to code switch between Ukrainian and English. I would first emphasize positive aspects of a story and then critique the portions I thought could use more work. In this way, I established for myself a set method as to how I would provide feedback to avoid missing comments that I felt were crucial to the success of my classmates' stories.

The same sort of nervousness flushed through me when it was almost my turn to receive feedback from my classmates and Dr. Rice. As instructed by Dr. Rice at the beginning of the semester, I sat in silence while I received feedback. Since I knew I couldn't write fast enough by hand, I resorted to typing out my classmates' feedback as they provided their comments on my short story "Angus Bruiser," which was about a dull old man who had lost but then regained connection with his younger brother Bo through a series of complications. My fingers were flying all over the keyboard as each classmate

spoke to ensure I didn't miss a single detail. The bulleted list of each classmate's feedback—only legible thanks to Microsoft Word—was full of grammatical errors, but I got it all down, and that's all that mattered to me.

Most of my classmates' constructive comments circulated around the fact that I was missing a central conflict that would've increased the tension in the story. However, there were some specific comments about the following: stiff dialogue, inconsistencies in the ages assigned to the characters Angus and Bo, and inconsistencies in plot development. Lastly, it was Dr. Rice's turn to share, and he echoed much my classmates' feedback and applauded specific details within the story. With the assistance of Dr. Rice and my fellow peers, I crafted "Angus Bruiser" (see Appendix B).

When I was permitted to respond, I stated, "Thank you, everybody. As you know, I've struggled with making certain places and details in my stories make sense, so I'll work on things like fixing the age issue and making Angus's character pop. The conflict between Angus and Bo will probably be the first thing I tackle during revision." My brain was in such chaos because of my nerves combined with the sheer multitude of thoughts after the feedback session, and I had neglected to notice that I had broken a sweat. I took off my fuzzy white sweater and slowly began to calm down.

The oftentimes emotional yet fulfilling weekly workshops throughout the semester allowed me to fully immerse myself in an academic discourse community where the discourse was written and verbal. My gradual improvement in writing short stories throughout the semester made me excited that I was making progress and grateful for such a rich educational experience. I had grown and felt most comfortable as an academic writer, but these workshops afforded me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone

and grow as a creative writer through the processes of writing short stories, providing critical feedback, and receiving feedback.

As I walked to my car after class at 9:20p.m., I called my husband Vadym and was excited to share how far I had come in writing a fictional short story that others truly enjoyed. Accepting my classmates' feedback on the short story and having them accept my feedback reassured me as I blended my experience in gaining an American education with who I am as a Ukrainian. After making progress in writing more and more refined stories while also giving more refined feedback on stories, I was able to acknowledge that I was a Ukrainian by heritage but an American as well because of educational experiences like these workshops. I felt that I could now call myself a Ukrainian American woman scholar because the professional writing courses I took showed me how to polish my academic and creative writing skills. My life as a professional writer consequently helped me blossom because I was fortunate enough to receive a variety of educational experiences that helped me to have a transformative impact on others. In the following section, I go into more depth about my religious community where I feel that my strong writing skills gained through these professional writing courses aided me in better dissecting choral hymns for church.

Expressing My Self through Music: Conducting A Slavic Ukrainian Choral Hymn

I walked up two flights of stairs from the choir practice room and into the main congregation space packed with fifty wooden pews, each spanning thirty feet across in length. The high, wooden ceilings didn't quite match the fluorescent lights, cream-colored walls, and dark red carpet. Vadym and I took our places on a wooden pew three rows back as a few church members finish up their whispered conversations and the women (including myself) quickly put on their shoulder-length gossamer head covers. These covers are required for each woman to wear due to the conservative Slavic Pentecostal tradition and strict adherence to the Bible where Paul speaks to the people of the Corinthian church: "For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels" (*New Revised Standard Version*, 1 Cor. 11.10). There were still a few minutes remaining before service began, and the last of the sixty members of Slavic Evangelical Church House of Prayer trickled in. Slavic Pentecostal church services conducted in the following manner: the men preach sermons that are separated by short prayers (in which all of the members kneel on the floor at their seats each time), congregational hymns, solo songs, group songs, instrumental pieces, or poems, with tithing completed during the final congregational hymn. During this service, the first brother or preacher walked onto stage, stood behind the podium, and stated a few introductory words after reading in Russian from the Bible.[1] There was a short prayer after the introduction in which all of the members—women, children, and men—kneeled, prayed, waited for the brother to say a few words of prayer toward its end, and finally, in

[1] The Russian language was a part of my church community. I privilege my Ukrainian identity over my Russian identity, and I choose to identify as Ukrainian because in my domestic community, I was raised to retain Ukrainian as my primary, dominant language.

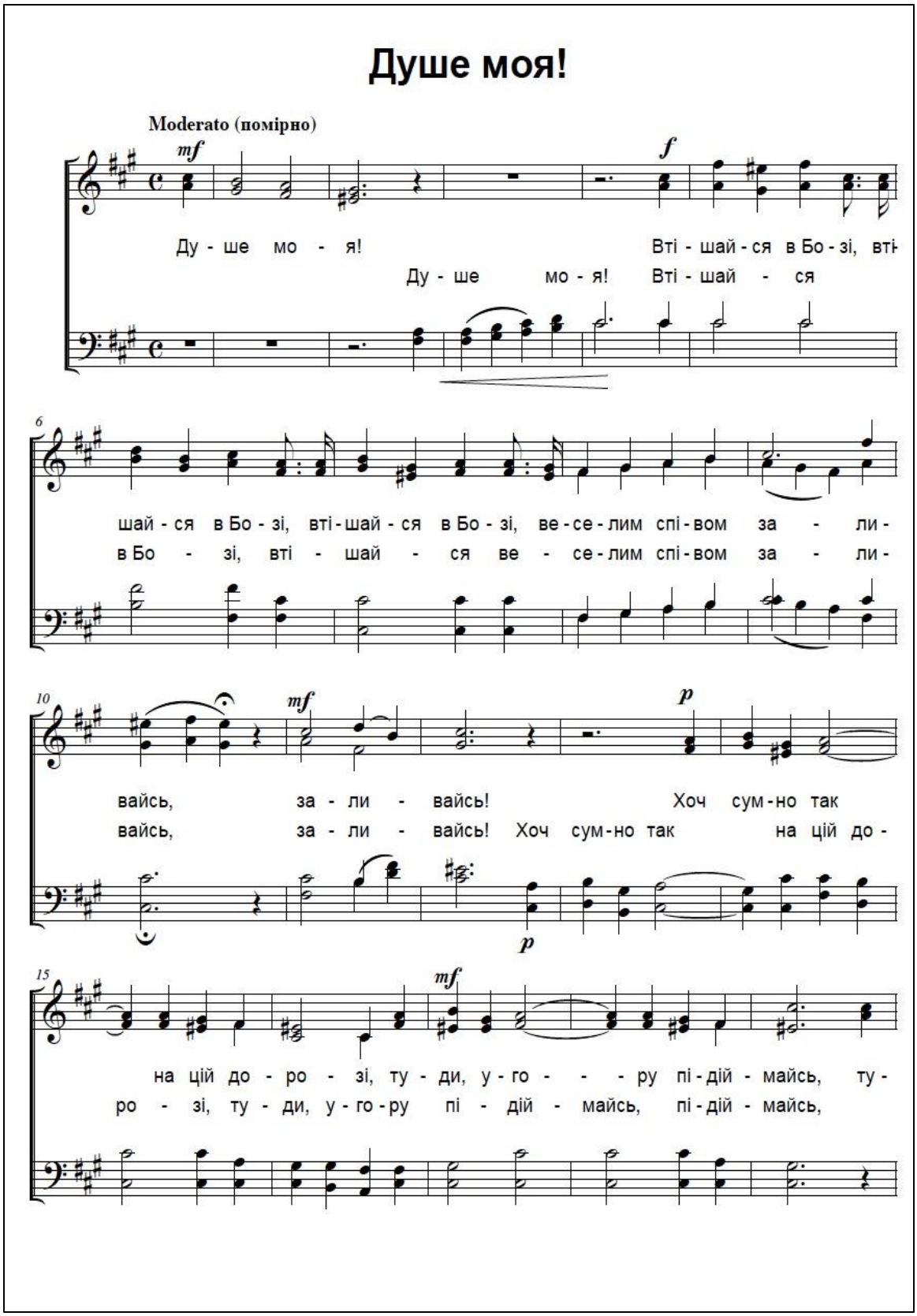
unison, everybody confidently stated The Lord's Prayer in Russian or Ukrainian depending on the language in which the brother was preaching (Matt. 6.9-13).[2]

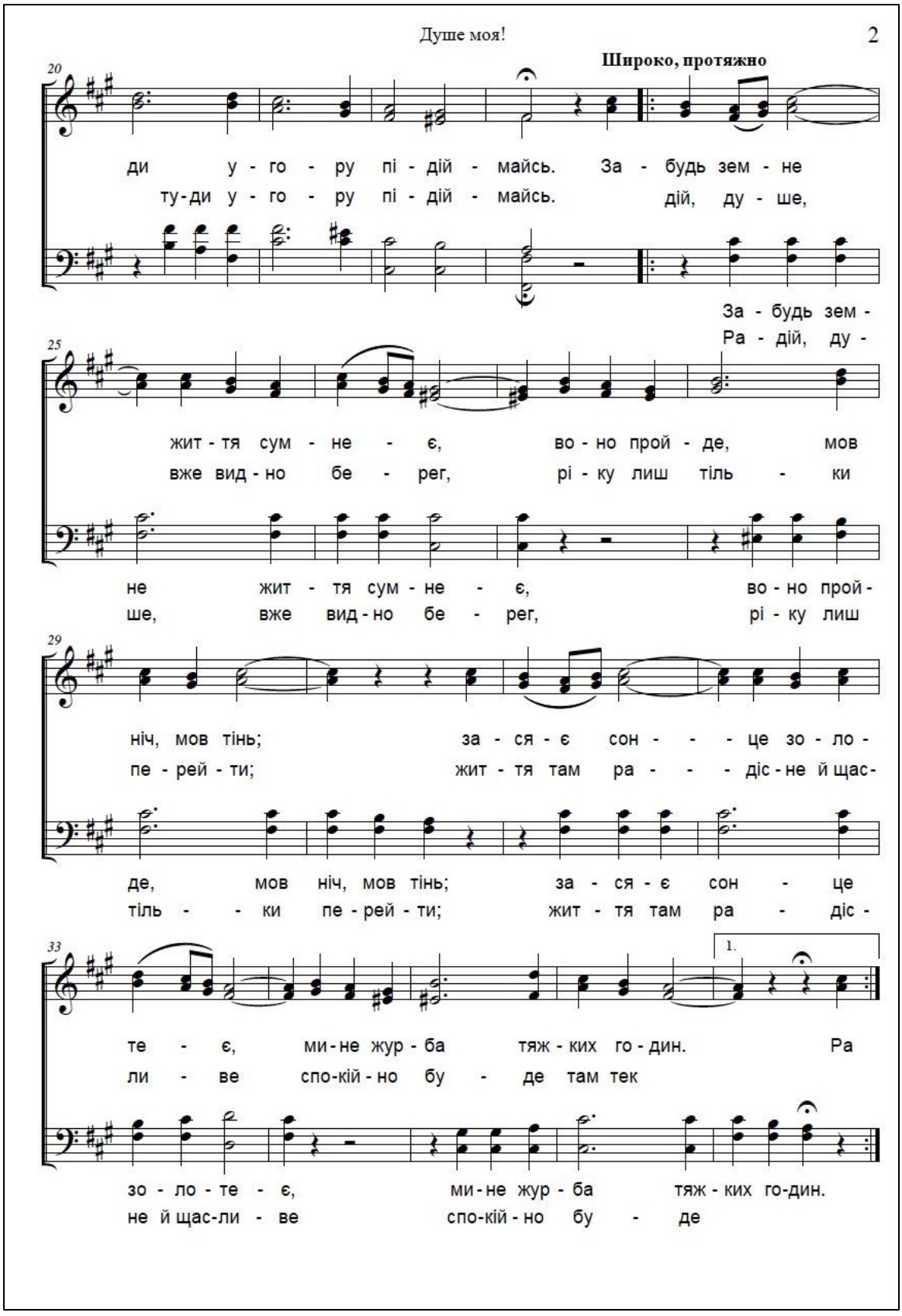
After this prayer, the congregation sand a Slavic hymn while I played the melody on violin and Sasha the church pianist provided the piano accompaniment. The entire service was conducted in Russian and Ukrainian including the sermons, hymns, prayers, poems, and general announcements. Many of the members on my dad's side of the family sang in church choirs their entire lives, so I grew up knowing and learning to love both Russian and Ukrainian hymns—singing them loudly whenever I had the chance. After five years of attending choir practice and singing hymns on Sundays, the ten choir members knew that the choral hymn immediately follows the first congregational hymn. The members took their places on stage as I adjusted my microphone to have it level with my full height and my music stand level with my hips. My back toward the congregation, I made the final adjustments as they stood in a traditional choral formation: three basses at the top left, two tenors at the top right, three altos at the bottom right, and two sopranos at the bottom left. We sing without musical or instrumental accompaniment, and I walked over to the large, black grand piano in order to strike the first notes of the hymn for the altos and sopranos who happen to begin this particular hymn without the bassists and tenors. I quickly walked back to the stand, lifted up my right arm—signaling the sopranos and altos to breathe together—and had them hum their beginning notes after I opened my palm.

This Sunday's choral hymn was a Ukrainian piece, *Душе Моя* (see Fig. 6), one of the most difficult choral hymns out of the sixty hymns this choir has sung over the past

[2] Jesus taught The Lord's Prayer to his disciples because they wanted instruction on how to pray (Matt. 6.9-13).

five years. Composed in a minor key with a narrative or story-like structure, the hymn begins soft, has a loud climax toward the middle, and ends softly.


Душе моя!
Moderato (помірно)
mf
f
Ду - ше мо - я! Вті - шай - ся в Бо - зі, вті
Ду - ше мо - я! Вті - шай - ся
6
шай - ся в Бо - зі, вті - шай - ся в Бо - зі, ве - се - лим спі - вом за - ли -
в Бо - зі, вті - шай - ся ве - се - лим спі - вом за - ли -
10
mf
p
вайсь, за - ли - вайсь! Хоч сум - но так
вайсь, за - ли - вайсь! Хоч сум - но так на цій до -
p
15
mf
на цій до - ро - зі, ту - ди, у - го - - - ру пі - дій - майсь, ту -
ро - зі, ту - ди, у - го - ру пі - дій - майсь, пі - дій - майсь,


Душе моя!
2
Широко, протяжно
20
ди у - го - ру пі - дій - майсь. За - будь зем - не
ту-ди у - го - ру пі - дій - майсь. дій, ду - ше,
За - будь зем -
Ра - дій, ду -
25
жит - тя сум - не - є, во - но прой - де, мов
вже вид - но бе - рег, рі - ку лиш тіль - ки
не жит - тя сум - не - є, во - но прой -
ше, вже вид - но бе - рег, рі - ку лиш
29
ніч, мов тінь; за - ся - є сон - - - це зо - ло -
пе - рей - ти; жит - тя там ра - - - діс - не й щас -
де, мов ніч, мов тінь; за - ся - є сон - це
тіль - - ки пе - рей - ти; жит - тя там ра - діс -
33
1.
те - є, ми - не жур - ба тяж - ких го - дин. Ра
ли - ве спо-кій - но бу - де там тек
зо - ло - те - є, ми - не жур - ба тяж - ких го-дин.
не й щас-ли - ве спо-кій - но бу - де

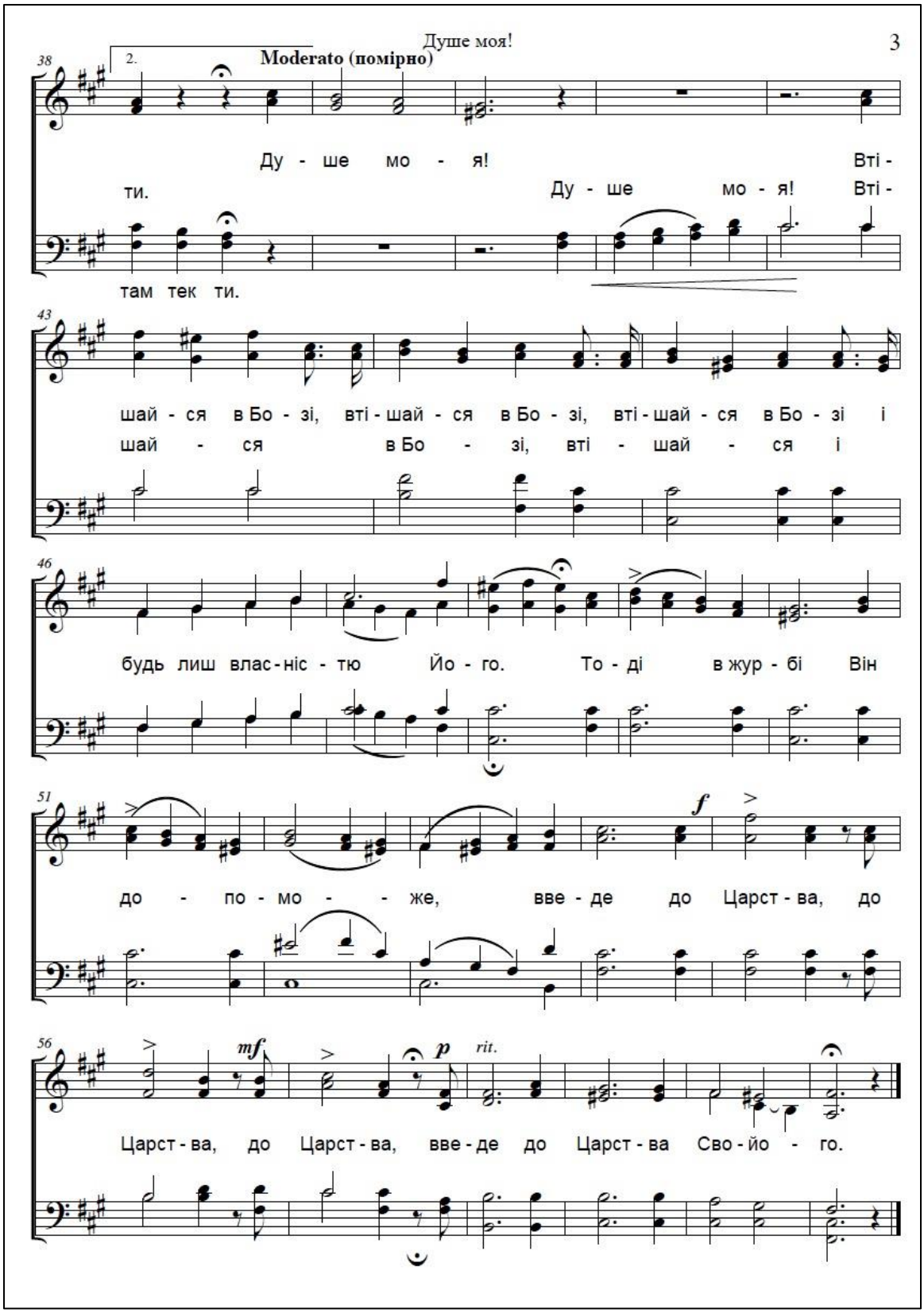


Fig. 6. A Ukrainian choral hymn *Душе Моя*, which directly translates to *My Soul*.

This was my favorite choral hymn because of its many surprising turns that reflect real life, and it also covered my favorite theme: finding comfort in our earthly walk as Christians. I acquired the Ukrainian language and literacy both in the home and at school; however, I attained musical literacy by teaching myself to conduct choral hymns. I thereby embrace Christianity as a part of my dual Ukrainian American identity because my active membership in the Slavic Pentecostal Church community partially forms who I am today. The congregation also highly values the faith-building power of music in the church, and the members chooses to be part of a church where we sing only Soviet-era Russian and Ukrainian hymns.

To start the hymn, I lifted my right arm, and the women began with a series of soft notes in thirds. The women took a brief rest, and I lifted my left arm to signal the men's entrance as they echoed the women's phrase of thirds with their own phrase of thirds. Then, lifting both arms, I showed the entire choir to sing the repeated phrase *Втішайся в Бозі* at a full *forte* (loud) dynamic on the first page as we urged the audience to find comfort in God. The excitement set in, and my upper body was already increasing in temperature.

In this moment, I felt accomplished, but only because I knew God placed me as choir conductor of this church through fellow church members' prayers and His divine intervention. As a twenty-three-year old, self-taught choir conductor, I felt lucky to have a singing talent and to know such a beautiful language because by continuing to speak and sing in Ukrainian because I was preserving my Ukrainian heritage and immersing myself in a religious community that continues to practice the music tradition of singing classic Slavic Pentecostal hymns composed during the Soviet era. I feel as though I am

keeping the language alive in the United States where only one million Ukrainians reside (Wolowyna). This is significant to me because the majority of all of the citizens in the US choose to participate as members of a mainly American culture while some Slavic Pentecostal immigrants such as my family, my church members, and me retained our Ukrainian identity while simultaneously assimilating with the American culture.

I realized I was beginning to get sidetracked by my personal excitement because music brings me great inner joy and strengthens my bond with God and my fellow church members. I guided the choir members into a smooth yet swift transition where the men sang *Хоч сумно так*, conveying how although it is sad on this earthly path, God is our comforter. One of the basses, my Uncle Nikolai, is always eager to sing his favored low notes, and this men-dominated section of the piece contained particularly low, deep notes. My dad, Aleksandr, one of the tenors, also started this section of the piece along with my uncle except with higher, tenor notes. In the next phrase beginning *Туди у гору підіймайсь*, the women sang at a *fortissimo* (very loud) dynamic, and the men followed, forming the climax of the song with the word *гору* in order to remind the congregation to look up at the sky when times are difficult. I thought to myself, "I have never been so happy." I felt proud of my cousin Tanya, an alto, and my Aunt Olga, a soprano, because it's difficult to lead harmony and melody in a choir with so few members. Singing as a group reinforces a developed familial bond between the ten choir members as well as the bond between my family and me as we support each other in maintaining the tradition of singing Slavic Pentecostal choral hymns in church. This tradition also strengthens my Ukrainian identity by helping me preserve the language and remember who I am as a woman with a dual identity—and not solely an American identity.

The second page was one long phrase that repeated but with different words, sung at an increased speed and strong *mezzo forte* (medium loud) dynamic; the identical phrases began with the lyrics *Забудь земне* and *Радій душе*, telling the church members to simultaneosuly forget earthly things and also be happy. I scrambled to conduct the complex, overlapping women's and men's parts. It's rewarding to have the ability to give hope to church members through hymns like *Душе Моя* because I strongly believe that singing has the power to uplift and heal individuals in need. The passion to spread that uplifting, healing power as the choir conductor encourages me to push through the remainder of the hymn even though my arms are tired after that dramatic, swift second page.

The third page began with the same notes and lyrics as the first page but then branched into a different melody with the lyrics *Тоді в журбі Він допоможе*, conveying to the audience that in sorrow, God will help. I sang the highest soprano notes of the song directly into my microphone to ensure proper intonation at such a loud moment, breathing from my stomach and pushing the air out to convey the drama of the impactful lyrics of the third page. The basses acted as a counterbalance to those high notes by sustaining a low note, while all of the other sections had moving notes. At that particular moment, I appreciated the composer's mastery in attaining such a graceful balance. I thought to myself, "Even though I'll never get to meet this composer from the former Soviet Union, I wish I knew what year this hymn was written and what inspired him to write it."

The lyrics on the third page led to a slow resolution toward the finish of the hymn, and it was obvious that the choir members were tired but determined to finish strong. I

guided them into the last few phrases that repeated the two words *До Царства* as the choir gradually decreased in volume and finished the hymn by holding out the final chord, reminding the listeners that we are striving to enter God's kingdom. I was sweating and exhausted both physically and mentally, but a feeling of contentment swept through me. I grinned wide after closing my fingers at the finishing chord. There's a dead silence for just a few seconds, and I'm silently praying that we moved at least one heart.

We all filed off stage to keep church service moving forward, and I took my place on the pew next to Vadym thinking, "My aunt Lesya would've loved this song." She passed in 2016, but my most fond memories with her were singing Ukrainian and Russian Slavic hymns together as her beautiful, grand alto voice would flow through the living room of aunt Olga's home where she lived. I knew I was happy while singing the hymn *Душе Моя* and content when I sat down because the choir sang the hymn beautifully. But most importantly, those few minutes after I sat down to contemplate the performance of the hymn made me fulfilled and at peace because I now knew who I sang for: individuals like my late Aunt Lesya who appreciated what it meant to hold onto who you are by continuing to sing in your native language.

A Worship Experience Like No Other:

Participating in a Prayer with Slavic Pentecostal Youth

About forty individuals—ages sixteen through thirty-three—arrived at a church named First Pentecostal Slavic Church of Atlanta in Lilburn, Georgia on 5 February 2019, to experience spiritual growth. This particular Slavic youth prayer was special because it was to be led by a woman named Oksana, who went to India on what was supposed to be a temporary missionary trip. She married an Indian man, and she now resides there permanently with their three children where she spreads the news of the gospel to its primarily Hindu residents (Christian Radio Network). Some of us arrived fifteen minutes before the prayer meeting to help arrange the gray chairs in a large circle about twelve feet in diameter. Originally, there were two sets of chairs that had been organized into two even squares, one on each side of the room. After the chairs were moved, the wide rectangular room with its low ceilings and a wooden pulpit at the front felt more open and inviting. The simple room with its cream-colored walls and navy blue, tough carpet didn't stand out.

I was twenty-three-years-old at the time, and my sister, Larissa, six years older than me, sat to my left and Vadym sat to my right. The prayer was to begin at 7:30 p.m. on this chilly February night, but Oksana arrived fifteen minutes late. She walked into the room, and everybody got quiet as she sat down next to my sister. I remember thinking, "Oksana is sitting so close to me." I was a bit intimidated, but once Oksana began speaking, her simple, open, direct way of teaching placed me at ease. Those at the prayer meeting knew she had the gift of prophesy because during the most recent Sunday church service, God spoke through her to individual members of this church; therefore, I was

hoping to receive a prophesy from her about my life because I was taught throughout my religious life to believe that God spoke through His nation.

Oksana first instructed us on how to conduct our daily lives in order to remain close to God. I took a few notes on my phone as she spoke (see Fig. 7):

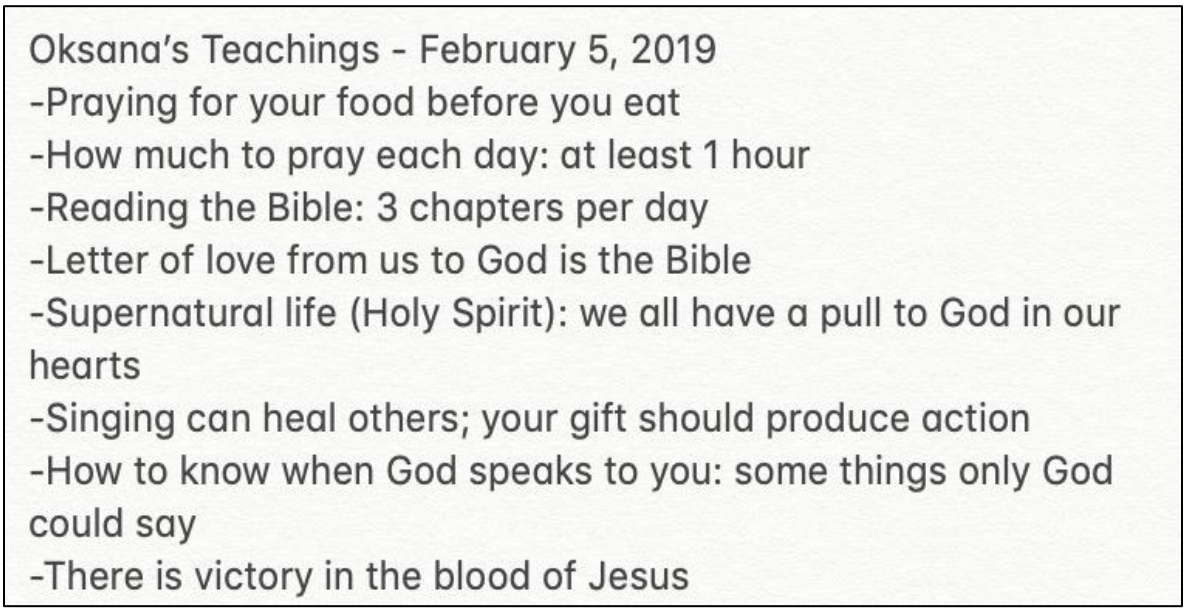


Fig. 7. My notes from Oksana's teachings on 5 February 2019.

Growing up in a Christian household, I never questioned these points. The Christian community chooses to attend church to be reminded of certain points that we may not have already implemented enough in our lives. I particularly liked the last point that she emphasized because she transformed the statement into a mantra for daily life that she repeats to herself and encouraged us to say the same in daily situations: "There is *victory* in the blood of Jesus!" I became inspired by these words because I had recited Bible verses such as Psalm 63:7[3] and Isaiah 38:20[4] to myself by memory, but I never

[3] Psalm 63:7 reads, "for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy."
[4] Isaiah 38:20 reads, "The Lord will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the Lord."

thought to use non-biblical phrases like that one throughout the day (Ps. 63.7; Isaiah 38.20).

When Oksana began talking about the miracles that occurred on a weekly basis at her local church in India, I was focused in on each word she said. She recalled many miracles, but the one that stuck out to me was that her husband—a man with the gift of casting out demons—was able to successfully cast two demons out of a woman who had attended their church service. Oksana even said that she videotaped an exorcism on her cellphone once, and she was happy to share that video; we, however, were too afraid to ask. I knew that seeing such a spiritually intense experience would take a toll on my spirit because I'm already an emotionally sensitive individual. Prophecies are a common practice all across the US in Slavic Pentecostal churches. Exorcisms, on the other hand, are rare in our community in the US because they are typically conducted by Slavic Pentecostal, middle-aged men and women who lead youth members on mission trips to countries where it is popular to practice forms of worshipping that do not praise the sole God of Christianity (i.e. Hinduism, Voodoo, and Wicca).

She then went around the room and asked each of us to share one miracle we had personally experienced or had seen in our lives. One of the teenagers wept after sharing how he had been run over by a car and was told by doctors that he would never walk again—he has been walking normally for five years since the accident. As he wept, I stared at the floor, thinking to myself, "I've never even broken a bone. I can't imagine what he went through." When it was my turn to share, I got nervous and barely put together the story of my miraculous experience: "I remember once not giving money to a homeless person because I thought he would use the money on things that could harm

him like alcohol. And I felt *so* bad that I didn't give him money, and I started to cry and asked God to allow me to run into another homeless person on the road. The very next day, there was a homeless person on the road. I gave him twenty dollars." Tears had filled my eyes as I told the story, but I didn't feel ashamed because by sharing, we had established the room as a safe space. After we shared, Oksana had reminded us of how many miracles happen in our lives each day, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem, and that God is a God of miracles.

After we shared, Oksana asked us to get on our knees and start praying. The prayer was spiritually moving and prompted many of us, including myself, to begin speaking in tongues. I briefly remembered reading about how Pentecostal Christians in particular are oftentimes portrayed as cult-like extremists, preaching messages strictly about the fire and brimstone of hell, which is not the case at all. I was proud in that moment to be speaking in tongues because my faith is the core of who I am, and what may seem like an odd practice to others happens to be an important piece of my religious identity as a member of the Slavic Pentecostal Church. My faith is also what allows me to participate in a religious discourse community where like-minded individuals gather to achieve the same goal: to reinforce their relationship with Jesus Christ.

The prayer was loud and intense, rising in volume at certain moments as brothers and sisters cried out to God . . . it was beautiful. During the prayer, I opened my eyes and saw that Oksana had begun prophesying to each of us. I became excited yet nervous as Oksana leaned down and started speaking into my left ear so that I could hear her well. Part of the prophecy included the following words: "You are my vessel. I [God] will speak through you, and many will listen." At that time, I didn't know what those words

were referring to, but it was reassuring to hear that God has a plan for my life. And I knew Oksana's words were true because other prophecies that I've received in the past from other prophets have all come to fruition.

Suddenly, Oksana asked us all to continue praying but to start singing as well, so I began singing the Slavic Russian hymn *Ты мой Бог Святой* because I wanted to emphasize God's power in that moment, and the prayer was transformed into a personal, layered spiritual experience for me because I had never been a part of prayer with an embedded singing component. I felt truly blessed in that moment to be a part of a community in which the youth members uplift each other by not only speaking common languages (Russian and Ukrainian) but also praying and singing together. My knees had started to ache, but Oksana encouraged us to start praying for specific groups of individuals such as preachers, the leaders of the United States, and women who have had miscarriages.

The prayer ended, and I looked at the clock on the wall in the back of the room and saw that it read 10:40 p.m. We had been here for three hours and praying for about one hour. We all had puffy, red eyes and sore knees, but it didn't matter because the love that we received from God that day was raw and real. I had experienced both a spiritual miracle that evening as well as a miraculous literacy experience that allowed me to flourish as a Ukrainian American woman because it was the mixture of Ukrainian, Russian, and English languages that made this evening unfold the way it did. These prayers affirmed the love and appreciation I have for the Ukrainian culture that has fostered my intellectual and spiritual growth in my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities.

During the hour-long drive home, I realized that those prayers about specific groups were prayers for those who handle many important responsibilities in their lives, and I was one of them. As a choir conductor and violinist at my own church, I felt in my soul the urge to uphold the Slavic Pentecostal tradition of preaching, reciting poems, and singing only in Ukrainian and Russian during services. If I didn't care about speaking and singing in those languages, then I would lose a crucial piece of who I am. Who am I if I don't take what I've learned from my unique literacy experiences and share that knowledge in order to positively transform the lives of others? Who am I if I'm not a Slavic Pentecostal Ukrainian American woman?

Conclusion

This project sought to blend both personal and cultural elements in order to convey my literacy experiences through the autoethnographic method (Ellis et al. 273). My educational arc from elementary school, through high school, and all through graduate school created in me a literacy that includes three languages, predominantly Ukrainian and English. By depicting how I strived to hold onto Slavic Pentecostal traditions by continuing to use the Ukrainian language yet welcoming American culture and speaking English, I presented the importance of holding fast to those traditions while never forgetting that I am a member of American society. This arc also helped me craft narratives that explained why my Ukrainian American heritage is such a crucial part of my literacy development.

My life as a Ukrainian American has evolved based on social interactions in my domestic, academic, and religious discourse communities because the influence of sponsors of literacy such as my parents, professors, and church members allowed me to unpack, re-see, and ultimately share the literacy experiences that make me who I am today through the process of writing the autoethnography. Crafting this set of narratives aided me in embracing my dual cultural identity despite the difficulties of being raised as an individual in a society who does not identify as solely American. This methodological approach enabled me to observe myself as a Ukrainian American woman assimilating into American society each day. Reflecting on my past experiences and producing "evocative thick descriptions" of my experiences has helped me acknowledge the power

of literacy and its ability to change the life of the writer as well as the readers (277). Producing this reflexive writing helped me more fully understand my life experiences as I sought to re-see those experiences through the lens of autoethnography. I have provided insight for the reader into my life by bridging the personal and the cultural through this introspective autoethnographic journey, thus stressing the importance of preserving my Ukrainian heritage while participating as a member of American culture.

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Appendix A

Exploding the Masculine/Feminine Binary through Writing and Collaborative Learning: A Rhetorical Analysis of Helene Cixous's The Laugh of the Medusa

Many women writers in Helene Cixous's lifetime attempted to promote women's right to partake in certain intellectual activities, and one specific activity that they advocated for was the right to write down valuable thoughts in order to share knowledge with others. Cixous's goal is different in the sense that she perceives writing as a way to completely remove the separation between men and women through writing the body and using an active, strong voice to do so. In her text *The Laugh of the Medusa*, she uses poetic language to describe how writing allows men and women to move past the masculine/feminine binary into a world where both are seen simply as people who all have the ability to write themselves and their thoughts through their bodies. Heavily influenced by Derrida, she adopts the viewpoint that binaries are not boxes in which people should strive to confine themselves but are rather meant to be exploded through writing. This paper will analyze how writing goes beyond a form of communication and becomes a method of empowerment through the smashing of binaries and the use of the body.

After a brief explanation of Derrida's concept of *différance* and how it connects to Cixous's use of binaries, homogeneity and heterogeneity are considered in terms of the masculine/feminine binary. This binary is part of the reason Cixous adopts Derrida's foundational concept of *différance* to further her argument about how to break out of that

binary. One of Cixous's key ideas that she underscores throughout the text is how a person's ability to move past the patriarchy through writing is valuable to both men and women because it allows them to avoid homogeneous thought and move into heterogeneous thought in which all writers can become bisexual. This idea of the bisexual writer is later directly connected to collaborative spaces in which writers and all people in general can work together as a body to build and produce new knowledge.

Therefore, it is essential to first understand the masculine/feminine binary in relation to the power of writing by underscoring how writing itself is a tool that gives the writer the potential to become an agent and produce social change in collaboration with others; furthermore, it allows the writer to express their voice, perspectives, beliefs, and ideas. And for a writer to produce social change, it is necessary to recognize that the masculine/feminine binary exists within the traditionally patriarchal societies that Cixous is referring to in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Thus, Cixous's emphasis on the masculine/binary directly correlates with *différance*, which is expounded upon in the following paragraph.

Cixous uses Derrida's concept of *différance* or the idea that "meaning is never truly present, but is only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers" (Moi 104). She deconstructs and therefore frames "patriarchal binary thought" by stating how "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (Moi 102; Cixous 1526). Here, Cixous defines the role of writing as a way for women to "dislocate this 'within,' to explode it . . . to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her

very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (Cixous 1532). Cixous breaks open patriarchal binary thought and "explodes" preconceived notions of who has the right to create knowledge through writing; in this way, she creates a space for women to enter into intellectual discourse.

Although Cixous is clearly against theorizing writing when states "for this practice can never be theorized," she accentuates how women should have a place in the conversation that men have dominated throughout history (1529). She inserts women into what she refers to as a "regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield" (1529). She hints at homogeneity as a negative aspect of discourse because it suggests a male-dominated, single-minded viewpoint developed over time. Furthermore, she injects women into her discussion of a masculine/feminine binary fashioned by historical and cultural norms when she declares that "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy" (Cixous 1526). She therefore deconstructs the meaning of that binary by suggesting that the negative perception of women as writers with valuable ideas only has meaning because men have perpetuated that perception both historically and culturally.

Cixous does not intend to place women on a pedestal or make them superior to men; rather, she gives women an active role so that they can envision a world in which all people—not just men or just women—can create and share spaces of various discourses in order to share knowledge. She even speaks to women directly when she states that "She [woman] must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which . . . will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and

transformations in her history" (1527). Women cannot literally re-create history, but Cixous highlights how woman can write "her self," not "herself." This significant difference in word choice suggests that Cixous is promoting a world in which women can shape their own identities through the empowering method of writing because Cixous comes to the forefront as a woman speaking from a woman's point of view, asserting that "I write woman: woman must write woman" (1525). This embracing of the idea of woman as an independent, "whole" self with her own relevant opinions and strong voice is illustrated most clearly when Cixous focuses on the woman's body as a potential source of empowerment (1533).

She couples the body and its desires in a firm proclamation of herself with the words "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs," emphasizing the point that women have significant knowledge to contribute to intellectual discourse, too (1525). Cixous then writes the woman's body into a male-dominated discourse by using writing as a vehicle to state that women can use their bodies for intellectual action, not just physical action as men tend to perceive when they think about the function of women's bodies. In one place, she affirms that women are "to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (1532). She writes women's bodies into an active role in another place when she says that "she [woman] blazes *her* trail in the symbolic" (1532). She solidifies these affirmations with these two bold statements: "Write your self. Your body must be heard" (1527). Cixous thus disrupts patriarchal binary thought because she directly tells women to stake their claim in the traditionally male-dominated sphere of intellectual thought through the act of writing.

Writing is manifested as a literal, physical act, which shows how Cixous is passionate in promoting writing as a way for women to unite and smash binaries; this uniting in turn allows for multiple thoughts to be shared in the same space, not just men's thoughts. Cixous hints at the fact that women cannot be categorized in relation to men because "you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes" (1524). Cixous breaks apart the masculine/feminine binary and transforms the traditional definition of the word "heterogeneous" by stressing the power of women's words. She supports this transformation with the words "Heterogeneous, yes. For her joyous benefit she is erogenous; she is the heterogeneity of the heterogeneous," consequently pushing for women's bodies and their ability to write their body as well as write with the body (1534). She nullifies the masculine/feminine binary by inserting language of the body within the text, hinting at one of her core concepts called bisexuality.

Cixous adopts a view of bisexuality not as a person attracted to multiple genders but bisexuality in terms of writing. She prompts the reader to think about bisexuality as "each one's location in self (*répérage en soi*) of the presence . . . of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex" (1530). Cixous's own expression of self comes about through writing because writing is characterized as an act in which all people receive full inclusion into the conversation no matter their gender. Cixous rejects the notion of the autonomous self by implying that writers do not work alone in individual, solitary environments or spaces. Rather, a writer becomes bisexual through collaborative writing practices precisely because "this vatic bisexuality . . . doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number" (1530).

Collaborative learning is therefore a fitting example of how bisexuality can serve as a base for knowledge-building practices because collaboration places emphasis on groups of people—not solitary individuals—who share ideas with one another.

For this reason, it is important to consider collaborative writing as an example of a practice in which differences are embraced through the sharing of various voices and opinions. If a teacher supports a collaborative writing classroom, then it is imperative for her to support that "one of the guiding principles of small-group pedagogy is the effort to relinquish teacher control" (Bruffee 59). Students have the power to use their own bodies to write their own voices through collaborative activities such as peer reviews, discussions, and workshops, thereby disrupting the traditionally organized classroom in a space where authority is decentralized. Cixous supports the idea that "Women should break out of the snare of silence," and this applies to the collaborative composition classroom because if writers can break out of the masculine/feminine binary (that presupposes a silencing of women) and into the world of intellectual dialogue, then such transformed collaborative writing practices can foster a more productive learning environment (1528). Cixous is not simply stating that women are to dominate discourse but that all writers should accept all other writers' voices and thoughts, and this kind of thinking is key to a collaborative writing approach.

Collaboration also gives writers the potential to form their identities through their voices and therefore become empowered as writers who work with, not against, other writers in "seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly *all* systems of exchange based on masculine thrift" (Cixous 1529). An example listed in the above paragraph is the workshop in which students can become bisexual writers and help each

other write their identities into their assignments. Both female and male students become bisexual writers because they invite difference into the learning process by accepting a wide range of feedback from their peers. In a topic-focused workshop such as a thesis statement workshop, students can "fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down" (Cixous 1532). In this statement, Cixous is speaking of disrupting the masculine/feminine binary and male-dominated history. This statement applies to the collaborative writing classroom as well; for example, if students are helping each other craft working thesis statements, they are in turn helping each other create claims for their papers in a multivoiced space where differences are shared, embraced, and each opinion is equally valued rather than only opinions of males holding value.

Additionally, collaborative writing practices allow for any person to affect social change because people are allowed to express and empower themselves by using their voices. For Cixous, change for women occurs because "The woman arriving over and over against does not stand still: she's everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives" (1536). Women can use their bodies to "exchange" information by reclaiming and writing themselves into history. Outside of the composition classroom, collaboration occurs when people of all genders gather and support a cause in the form of movements that allow everybody and every body to take part in a shared experience. A breaking away from the homogenous and breaking into the heterogeneous occurs because people are "*In body*" and magnify important issues collaboratively, thus transforming history in a bisexual manner (Cixous 1532).

This concept of body relates to both the composition classroom as well as people who make a conscious, combined effort to affect social change. To oversimplify Cixous's idea of the body by saying that the writer is strictly an individual body and that each person involved in a movement is strictly an individual body would be to incorrectly interpret her main aim in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. On the contrary, writers in a classroom, people who gather to establish movements, or any other groups who attempt to shape their identities and voices by producing change are not only individual bodies but also bodies of people. A true collaborative classroom is a bisexual body of writers while groups of people who gather to make changes in society are also bodies of people who reorganize and re-embody a historically patriarchal world. These spaces—no matter if the physical space is the classroom, outside, or inside of a building—become multivoiced and consequently multifaceted spaces in which bodies of people who "are body" gather to bring forth change and spread knowledge (Cixous 1532).

The ideas of *différance*, binaries, homogeneity versus heterogeneity, bisexuality, and collaborative learning come into play when considering the impact Cixous has on the field of rhetoric. As displayed in this paper, her aim in *The Laugh of the Medusa* is to magnify the issue of a male-dominated society by thrusting women into the conversation and injecting the reader into her version of writing based on a "historico-cultural" context (Cixous 1530). She successfully manages to address women, all writers, and all people who want to promote positive change at the same time, especially when she speaks of herself with the words "When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me . . . , and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love" (1536). This poetic language calls forth a

unification of all people and places at the forefront and the chance for a community of people to collaborate and explode the masculine/feminine binary. By moving past that binary and embracing the bisexual, the bodies of people have the ability to empower and express themselves with their own bodies and voices. And that is why for Cixous, if all people can practice collaborative learning without giving one group's thoughts privilege over that of another, all bodies of people will have the chance to share knowledge because "In one another we will never be lacking" (1536).

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Appendix B

Angus Bruiser

Beep, beep, beep. The neon red of sixty-five-year-old Angus Bruiser's digital alarm flashed 5:30. He pressed the off button with two fingers, rolled over from the left side of the bed, and touched his feet to the floor. He shuffled to his massive bathroom and stood in front of the wide mirror and the one sink surrounded by white marble countertop. After rolling up the sleeves of his black silk shirt that matched his pants, he opened the faucet and splashed cold water over his baggy, wrinkled eyes, scruffy gray brows, and coarse, gray, two-inch mustache.

He walked past his gray dresser and flicked on the light inside his closet. The walls of the closet were the same color as the bedroom walls, a mute, dull gray. Every hanger was spaced one inch from the one next to it, and the dress shirts were color-coded from light to dark: three white shirts, three gray shirts, three navy shirts to match his black pants, a black belt, polished black shoes, and single dark gray tie.

He began his walk to the kitchen toward the coffee machine. Amongst all of the white appliances, the burgundy machine stood out. He would've liked a white one, but they were out of stock in all colors except burgundy. With swift, mechanical movements, he poured the dark, shiny beans into the machine and pressed all of the necessary buttons to get it going. While the coffee was brewing, he took out a sesame seed bagel, thin slices of smoked salmon, and plain cream cheese from the fridge and slammed its door shut. He

had placed the food in one hand and reached for a plate with the other, and some of the salmon fell out of the package and onto the floor.

"Fan-tastic. Just fantastic."

He bent down and scooped up the salmon with his chubby fingers, immediately flinging the pieces into the garbage. He sat down at the dining room table after toasting the bagel. While spreading a thin layer of cream cheese onto each half and layering on the salmon, he thought about how he used to wake up to the smell of coffee. It had been five years since Angie had passed, but since Angus didn't socialize much, she was the only one that had looked into his light green eyes while he spoke instead of looking at his intimidating, permanent slight frown. Other people looked at him as if he was always a little pissed while Angie looked at him with love. He sighed and stared down at the scraps of salmon and sesame seeds that had fallen out of his bagel and onto the plate.

He almost didn't notice that Mr. Scruffers—a shaggy, gray-and-white miniature schnauzer—was already at his feet, waiting patiently to lick the plate. He would have preferred to have no pets, but since this was Angie's dog, he decided to keep him. After letting Mr. Scruffers lick off the food bits, he washed the plate. And with his oddly precise internal clock, the last few drops of coffee fell into the ceramic mug as he placed the plate onto the drying rack.

He let the coffee cool for about ten minutes as he sat down in the living room in his mahogany wood chair and flipped to the "Business Day" section of the *New York Times*.

"Well, the Dow tanked 1,033 points. We're losin' a bit this month, Scruffers. I could teach them a thing or two. I hope Equifax will do okay."

After reading about some of the failures and mistakes of prominent business figures, Angus set off to get another Monday "in the bag," as he would say. He chugged his black coffee, tied his dress shoes tight, and picked up his black leather briefcase. Before closing the front door, he called out to the dog.

"Betty will take you to the dog park in a few hours, so be a good boy," giving Mr. Scruffers a scratch on the head as he said so.

Autumn in Atlanta used to be his favorite time of the year when he could enjoy Saturday picnics with Angie, but now that she was gone, he barely noticed the splotches of red, green, and yellow tree leaves while driving to work on I-75. He now liked the stormy nights during spring and winter when streaks of lightning would create a web across the sky and the house would shake from the thunder. A driver honked at Angus, cut him off, and yelled at him to go faster.

Angus made a deep frown and whispered to himself, "Quit your gripin'. Ya should've driven out earlier."

After he parked his brand new, silver Ford truck into the space marked "Reserved for Equifax CEO," he walked into the Equifax building with his briefcase clutched at his side, knowing that his pesky assistant Burt Barnaby would ask him if he wanted coffee.

"Hi, Mr. Bruiser. I meant good morning. Or just hi. Would you like some coffee? I ordered an extra cup on accident. Hazelnut latte. I think you'd like it," Burt sputtered as they stepped into the elevator and rode to the top floor together.

"Stop tryin' to be my friend, Burt. You're a good worker. That's enough. And I drink coffee at home. Black. No sugar. No extra flavors."

"That's alright. Well, here's the itinerary for the day," he said, handing Angus a piece of paper including a list of three items.

1. 9:00am to 10:00am – Skype meeting with two CEOs from other credit reporting agencies

2. 1:00pm to 1:30pm – Meeting with Chief Human Resources Officer

3. 2:00pm to 4:00pm – Interviews with three potential candidates for the open Business Analyst position

"I want you in my office at 8:50 sharp, Burt. I need you to take notes during the nine am meeting."

"Alright, I'll make sure to do that. Is there anything else you need from me?"

"Try to keep the noise down in the office today. I have a splitting headache already."

"Absolutely."

After this short exchange, Angus plopped himself onto his black leather chair, reclined for a few seconds, and got to work checking emails and straightening the name plaque, pen cup, and other small items on his L-shaped, large mahogany desk.

The day was busy and more stressful than usual. At eight thirty, he checked his emails, at nine was the meeting with the CEOs, and finally, the midday moment of silence came at twelve when he locked his office for lunch. The worker bees knew better than to bother Angus during his favorite time of the day. His doctor told him to start eating more greens, so he ordered a salad from a nearby restaurant with strips of steak and bleu cheese on top, smothering the lettuce with the ramekin of ranch that came with the salad. And the steak and ranch didn't bother him one bit despite the fact that his

doctor told him to try and eat less meat and dairy. Halfway through the meal, his office phone rang.

“Dammit, this is why we have email now. Why won’t they just email me if it’s that important?” he said to himself as small pieces of lettuce flew out of his mouth.

He picked up the phone. “Bruiser,” he snapped while cleaning his teeth with his tongue, making a “tsssk” sound as he did so.

“Angus?” The woman on the line asked, unsure of whether or not she had reached the right person.

He immediately recognized the voice of his brother’s wife and stiffened up. The last time he had seen Sue was at his brother Bo’s wedding when Bo and Sue got married. “Sue, is that you?” he stammered, afraid of sounding excited to hear her voice. What are you calling the office for? You’ve never called while I was at work. Actually, we barely talk at all.”

“I know you don’t check your phone during work, so I figured I could reach you through your office phone.”

“You just know how to reach me, Sue,” he replied, with a jolly hint in his voice. “Why are you callin’?”

“It’s about your brother,” she said.

“What, is the onion farm failing? He need my money again? Always knew it would fail. He was dumb enough to keep it going after pa died, and dumb enough to not sell it when I told him to.”

“No . . . it’s not that. I don’t really know how to say it, Angus, but Bo is sick.”

“How sick?”

"Stage four prostate cancer. He doesn't have too long left. Just figured you might wanna know since he's your brother."

"Wow. My little brother's dying. Haven't been to Vidalia ever since I moved to Atlanta. Too many sad memories. But he *is* my only brother."

"Yeah, I didn't think you would care too much since y'all don't talk often. But you should come, Angus. You're the only blood relative he has left."

"I'm still at work. And it feels like there's a hammer comin' at my head every other dang minute. I'll call you after I get home."

"Alright. Please come, Angus. I know you two were never close, but Bo needs you. He really needs you."

"Please come," Angus whispered to himself as the monotone *beeeeeep* of the ended call droned in the background. Before meeting Angie, Angus used to hang out with Sue, Bo, and some other friends since they went to the same college. And all he would remember after hanging out was her sweet, melodic voice that would keep him up at night.

A pang of pain came from the back of his head, throwing him out of his minute-long flashback. He took a big bottle of Advil out of the top desk drawer and popped three pills into his mouth. He and Bo had never been close, but the thought of his only remaining family member being this sick magnified his already-splitting headache into a migraine. And to make it worse, hearing Sue interrupted his daily routine. He rushed through the meetings with the potential employees, exited the building, got into his car, and laid his head on the steering wheel after blasting the AC. A mass of gray clouds had

glazed the horizon and made the colorful trees a blur in the background, making the drive through traffic, fog, and drizzle even worse.

He slammed the truck door after getting home and swept right past Mr. Scruffers who had put his paws in the air for a belly rub. After setting down his briefcase, he changed into a t-shirt and sweat pants. Two rooms in the three-bedroom house were used as offices, but ever since Angie passed, Angus started to paint each day for what his doctor called "stress relief" and "mood enhancement." After walking into his art studio, Angus closed the door and pulled out a blank canvas, centering it on the easel. He clicked "play" on the boombox and began sweeping across the canvas in broad, red-and-pink strokes with his largest brush as Janis Joplin's "Me and Bobby McGee" piped through the boombox speakers. About thirty minutes had gone by when Mr. Scruffers started whimpering from behind the door. Angus let Mr. Scruffers in, lifted him onto his lap, and finished painting as the dog dozed off. Within fifteen minutes, Angus had completed his painting and signed it "A. Bruiser." He examined the painting with a furrowed brow, becoming his own art critic.

"Needs a little work. Too much red on the right and too much pink on the left. But it's alright. Right, bud?"

Mr. Scruffers barked and wagged his tail while looking at Angus with a happy glint in his eyes.

"We're goin' to Vidalia, Scruff. We have to. For Bo."

He called Sue and told her to get a room in the house ready since he would be there in a few hours. Within an hour, he had taken a shower, packed a bag of clothes and toiletries, and eaten a dinner of spaghetti noodles with Alfredo sauce on top. A piece of

the spaghetti fell onto the dark brown hardwood floor, and Mr. Scruffers ate it within seconds, licking the sauce off his lips afterward. Angus had the travel bag in his left hand, and with his right, he took Mr. Scruffers from underneath, propped him up onto his hip, and carried him into the truck. After warming up the truck and driving out, he glanced into the rear-view mirror at his tall, mute blue house. Angie had convinced Angus to paint it blue instead of gray for just a little pizzazz.

"I lost Angie, and now I'm losin' Bo. Divine Intelligence is just not on my side, Scruff."

The little dog hopped from the passenger seat and onto Angus's lap. Angus drove like that for almost the entire three-hour trip aside from a bathroom break at a gas station near Vidalia. Soon after stopping at the gas station, they passed a sign that read "Welcome to Vidalia: The Sweet Onion City." The wide, long fields of bright green onion shoots were such a blur at night that an inattentive driver could've mistaken them for grass. Angus was surprised that he remembered the back roads of Vidalia, especially since he and Angie moved from Vidalia to Atlanta decades ago. He remembered a phone conversation with Sue about three months back when she had described what the house looked like. He knew he was at the correct house when he reached the long, flat gravel driveway ending with a one-story, white house that had turned a faded yellow from years of built-up pollen and nasty weather.

Hannah and Holly, ages seven and eight, had been sitting at the front window of the house, eagerly waiting for Uncle Angus to arrive since they had never seen him in person. They burst through the front door, thinking he would hug them and maybe even give them candy or a special treat just like their mom would on special occasions.

"Uncle Angus! We're Holly and Hannah! It's nice to meet you!" Holly exclaimed.

"Hi, girls. Here's Mr. Scruffers. Be nice to him." He handed Hannah the dog, and she hugged him tight, running into the house with Holly to play with him.

"Hi, Angus. Sorry about the kids," Sue said. "Come on in. The guest room is set up. It's small, but I'm sure you won't stay long since you have to get back to Atlanta for work."

"I think I'll stay for a couple days. Thanks."

Sue looked down so that Angus wouldn't see her wide smile.

"The last time I saw this place, Bo and I fought," Angus said.

He made sure to keep his eyes focused on the furniture and the objects in the house. The fight had been about Sue, and he didn't want to make that obvious by looking straight into the eyes of the woman who never loved him.

"Bo's resting in the bedroom whenever you're ready. I'm glad you came, Angus," she said.

Angus looked up, and their eyes locked. Sue opened her mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

"Thanks, Sue. I'm gonna settle in and see Bo," Angus said, pretending not to notice the tension gradually building between them.

After throwing his bag onto the guest room bed, Angus walked up to Bo's door. He turned the worn bronze knob, and the hinges creaked. Bo was lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling with his eyes wide open. A quilt—hand-stitched with yellow and blue squares—was tucked under his armpits, revealing even more of his jaundice yellow skin. Bo didn't turn his head toward the door when he heard it open. Angus sat down on the

old oak chair that was a few inches from the bed, imagining himself as one of the many visitors that had sat on this same chair.

Bo turned his head, and Angus looked into the light green eyes of his little brother. Bo's face was tired, wrinkled, and worn from hours of work in the sun.

"Remember the last time we saw each other?"

"Yeah. We were fightin' over Sue even though we knew she would end up with me," Bo said.

"And now you have two kids," Angus replied.

"Wish I spent more time with 'em. Wasted too much time running the onion farm. Should've sold it a while ago like you said. Got too comfortable, and now Sue has to sell it herself."

Angus frowned deeply as he thought about his own life. With Angie gone, he had nothing meaningful remaining. His life was reduced to the three things that even Angus felt had little value: a big, empty house full of memories and no children, a job that he enjoyed but took hours out of his day just to drive there and back, and a dog that he kept only because he was Angie's dog.

"I'm sorry I didn't come back to visit after we fought."

"It's alright. I'm glad you came. To be honest, I didn't think you'd come. It's a relief to know that *somethin'* finally made you want to come down here."

Angus immediately stiffened up.

"Well, I'm glad I came," Angus said.

"I'm tired, and the next chemo treatment is tomorrow. Gotta get some sleep."

"Alright, I'll let you go. Night."

"G'night, Angus."

Sue woke Angus up early in the morning, and he knew something was off because the tone of her voice was solemn and her eyes were red and puffy.

"Where's Bo? Did he get his chemo already?"

Angus looked at the clock: 6:10am.

"I'm so sorry, Angus. I came in to lie down next to him. We said goodnight to each other, and I fell asleep. I woke up a few minutes ago and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't respond. I already called 9-1-1," Sue said.

Angus got up, walked past Sue, and opened Bo's bedroom door with a slow, robotic motion. He was in the exact same position as when Angus had talked to him just a few hours ago. He sat on the wooden chair and stared at Bo.

Sue grabbed a chair and pulled it up next to Angus.

"We never know when our time will come. Some people call it the natural cycle of life and death, but I know it was God's will to take Bo away. May he rest in peace," Sue said as she choked back tears.

"Maybe it *is* God's will. I don't know. At least he's not suffering anymore," Angus said.

Sue took Angus's hand into hers and gently squeezed it. They looked at each other with sad smiles as the sun crept up, illuminating the sky while just barely grazing the tips of the crisp green onion shoots as the ambulance sirens blared in the background.

Diana Prokopiev
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EDUCATION

Kennesaw State University, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw, Georgia
Master of Arts in Professional Writing, August 2017–May 2019
Concentrations: Composition and Rhetoric; Creative Writing
Title of Capstone: *Exploring My Unique Literacy Experiences as a Ukrainian American Emerging Scholar through Autoethnography*
Relevant Coursework: Issues and Research in Professional Writing; Understanding Writing as a Process; Context, Style, and Audience in Professional Writing; Advanced Creative Nonfiction; Poetry Writing; Fiction Writing
Cumulative GPA: 4.0/4.0

Bachelor of Arts in English, May 2017
Cumulative GPA: 4.0/4.0, Summa Cum Laude

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia

Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2017–Present
- Communicate to students how to write academic, professional texts effectively and efficiently
- Develop course materials in line with SACS and sound pedagogical theory

Writing Assistant, August 2017–May 2018
- Provided writing strategies to improve organization, format, and grammar
- Explained how to identify and solve writing issues in formal and informal texts

Submissions Editor for The Crambo, August 2018–December 2018
- Reviewed creative writing submissions (art, short stories, and poems) for KSU's literary journal *The Crambo*
- Provided critical feedback to editors and authors regarding publication recommendations

Copy-Editor for Department of Conflict Management at KSU, Nov. 2018–Jan. 2019
- Copy-edited two portions of the textbook *Conflict Management for Managers: Resolving Workplace, Client, and Policy Disputes* by Dr. Susan Raines
- Reworked and edited tables and diagrams for accuracy and clarity
- Conducted final proofreading

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Cherokee County Adult Detention Center, Canton, Georgia
Volunteer ESL Teacher, June 2018–August 2018

- Collaborated with the education program manager and volunteer ESL teachers to create themed worksheets for beginning, intermediate, and advanced English Language Learners
- Created screencasts outlining concrete teaching methods to accompany worksheet materials

Slavic Evangelical Church House of Prayer, Marietta, Georgia
Choir Conductor, January 2014–Present

- Facilitate with explaining the depth of meaning and narrative structure within Russian and Ukrainian choral hymns
- Lead choir members through the process of properly implementing musical elements such as style and tone

AWARDS AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES/PUBLICATIONS

- Presented a paper at the African Literature Association conference (May 2015)
- Published a poem titled “Lost” in Issue 2 of The Crambo (Spring 2019)
- 2016 Outstanding Student Award (Kennesaw State University–Dept. of English)
- 2017 Outstanding Senior Award for English

ADDITIONAL SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Accessibility Basics Certified Badge
- Fluent in Ukrainian and Russian
- Proficient in Microsoft Office